Character Types from Populist Genres in Joseph Conrad's Urban Fiction

Ph.D Thesis

Andrew Glazzard
Royal Holloway, University of London

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Andrew Glazzard, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

Table of Contents

Abstract of Thesis

This thesis investigates the relationship between literary and popular/populist fiction by examining Conrad's use of five character types common in popular fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the detective, the informer/spy, the spymaster, the anarchist/terrorist, and the swindler. Conrad's fiction has previously been situated in relation to 'exotic' genres such as adventure fiction; what is original about my thesis is its use of a very wide range of texts from 'urban' genres such as detective and espionage fiction to reconstruct what Conrad's contemporary readers would have expected from novels featuring the character types listed above. This enables a more thorough examination of Conrad's engagement with urban genres than has previously been attempted, using popular texts not previously examined in relation to Conrad.

The thesis argues that Conrad appropriated character types from populist genres for three reasons: as a commercial strategy to make his fiction marketable, as a way of responding to topical or contentious social and political issues, and as a means of creative experimentation. The thesis argues that Conrad's fictions are simultaneously 'literary' and 'popular', and that Conrad achieved distinctive aesthetic effects by applying particular literary techniques – what he called "treatment" – to popular subjects such as crime and espionage. This rewriting of genre fiction enabled Conrad to balance the demands of the literary marketplace with artistic and ethical aspirations, and to produce a wide range of narratives that varied significantly in aesthetic effect. Finally, the thesis argues that reading Conrad's narratives alongside examples from populist genres forces us to question critical judgments built on assumptions that popular fiction is necessarily inferior to literary

fiction, and that Conrad's own assertions that his fictions belong to an aesthetic realm untainted by commercial considerations are unreliable.

A Note on Texts

Unless stated otherwise, all references to Conrad's works are to volumes in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad where available, or to Dent's Collected Edition (22 volumes, 1946-55) where not. One exception is Conrad and F.M. Hueffer's *The Inheritors*, for which I have used the Liverpool University Press edition (1999). References to Conrad's letters are to *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* (see bibliography for details). The following abbreviations for Conrad's works have been used in citations:

C	*Chance*
CL	*The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*
I	*The Inheritors*
LE	*Last Essays*
LJ	*Lord Jim*
NLL	*Notes on Life and Letters*
PR	*A Personal Record*
SA	*The Secret Agent*
SS	*A Set of Six*
UWE	*Under Western Eyes*

Introduction

The All-Powerful Masses and the Limited Coterie:

Conrad and Reputation, Popularity, and Genre

> I have some – literary – reputation but the future is anything but certain, for I am not a popular author and probably I never shall be. That does not sadden me at all, for I have never had the ambition to write for the all-powerful masses. I haven't the taste for democracy – and democracy hasn't the taste for me.[1]

> …what I always feared most was drifting unconsciously into the position of a writer for a limited coterie: a position which would have been odious to me as throwing a doubt on the soundness of my belief in the solidarity of all mankind in simple ideas and in sincere emotions.[2]

"Some – literary – reputation"

In his affectionate memoir of his father, *Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered*, John Conrad recalled that, at Christmas, "I was always given a bound volume of the previous twelve issues" of the *Boy's Own Paper*. For the young John, the appeal of the magazine was its "adventure stories, well written and exciting, with instalments spread over several months' issues". The volume seemed to attract the interested attention of another member of the Conrad household: "I am pretty sure that J.C. read it after I had gone to bed because I found little spills of cigarette ash between the pages" (J. Conrad 1981: 31-32).

This anecdote is revealing about Joseph Conrad the reader and, by extension, the writer. That there is a relationship between Conrad's fiction and various kinds of popular literature, particularly adventure fiction, has long been recognized, but the

[1] Conrad to the Baroness Janina de Brunnow, 2 October 1897 (*CL*1 390)
[2] Conrad, 'Author's Note' (1920), in *Chance* (1913), xxxii-xxxiii.

significance of the relationship remains a matter of debate. Some critics and influential readers have seen Conrad as a writer of romances or adventure narratives in the tradition of Frederick Marryat, whose "greatness" Conrad praised in his 1898 article 'Tales of the Sea' (*NLL* 46-49), and who was one of the few writers whom he recommended to his son John (167). John Masefield, for example, criticized his fiction for failing to live up to its generic promise (White 1993: 172), while even a critic as perceptive as George Orwell emphasized Conrad's "romanticism", which he attributed to an out-dated belief in the existence of the "English gentleman": "As a result he was constantly creating characters in whom a capacity for having adventures, and a capacity for appreciating them, were combined in a way that is impossible in real life" (Orwell 1968: 387-89). For this reason, Orwell went on to dismiss *Lord Jim* (1900) – now one of Conrad's most admired novels for its proto-modernist techniques and themes – as "an absurdity as a whole". The enrolment of Conrad into the "Great Tradition" by F.R. Leavis (1948) and the subsequent reappraisal of his novels as modernist or proto-modernist by critics such as Thomas C. Moser (1957) and Albert J. Guerard (1958) ensured that his fiction became valued later in the twentieth century precisely for those features that distinguished it from popular forms, such as innovative narrative techniques, literary impressionism, and its philosophical climate of uncertainty and scepticism. More recently, Conrad's exploitation of popular genres has come under renewed attention, with influential work by Andrea White (1993) and Linda Dryden (1999) identifying adventure stories as the cultural products of an imperialist ideology that shaped Conrad's fiction, and which he simultaneously assimilated and subverted. Their approach reconciles the previously contradictory views of Conrad the 'romancer' and Conrad the 'modernist', reminding us that Conrad's reading of "light holiday literature" (*LJ* 6), no less than Lord Jim's, cannot

have failed to leave an impression, while preserving Conrad's position as a 'serious' writer worthy of continued attention and scholarship.

The impression left of Conrad the reader by his son's memoir points to a contradiction in Conrad's writing that the following chapters will explore. Conrad was sufficiently attracted by "well-written and exciting" yarns to appropriate his son's Christmas present, yet he felt obliged to do so covertly, even amongst his own family. Elsewhere, John Conrad commented that, while his father was not immune from the material appeal of books, he was much more interested in the quality of the text – but what he valued as a reader was traditional narrative:

> He liked books to be well bound but it was their contents that mattered and he never kept a book of which he did not approve – there was no room for 'bosh' in his bookcases. He was a fast reader, not a skimmer reading bits here and there, but a perspicacious reader who obtained the greatest satisfaction from a good story well written. (100)

What Conrad would have viewed as "bosh" John does not record, although Conrad's letters are peppered with scathing references to some of the successes of late Victorian and Edwardian popular literature. One particularly revealing letter is dated "Christmas 1898" and addressed to his cousin's wife, Aniela Zagórska. In it, Conrad reviews the literary field, starting with the three most popular and successful authors in Britain in the 1890s: Grant Allen ("a man of inferior intelligence"), Marie Corelli ("*not* noticed critically by the serious reviews"), and Hall Caine ("a kind of male Marie Corelli […] a megalomaniac, who thinks himself the greatest man of the century") (*CL*2 137-38).[3] Having written off the most successful, Conrad turns to the writers who have earned

[3] Hall Caine was also caricatured in Conrad and Hueffer's *The Inheritors* (1901) as the portentous, self-publicizing novelist Callan: "With his lofty forehead and with his superior, yet propitiatory smile, I was of course familiar. Indeed one saw them on posters in the street. […] Callan sat there in an appropriate attitude – the one in which he was always photographed" (*I* 12).

his approval: Rudyard Kipling, J.M. Barrie, George Meredith, Constance Garnett as a translator of Turgenev, George Moore, Theodore Watts-Dunton, and H.G.Wells.[4] Conrad's selection of approved authors combines the notably literary, such as Meredith, with some who were also commercially successful, such as Kipling and Wells. Conrad's praise for Wells, though, emphasises both his innovativeness ("a very original writer […] an astonishing imagination") and his adaptation of popular forms ("romancier du fantastique") (*CL*2 138). This suggests Conrad the reader valued innovation rather more than his son suggests. However, such was the inclusiveness of Conrad's reading that we must conclude he was prepared to read a great deal of contemporary fiction, for work or pleasure, whether or not he considered it to be of high quality. Evidence for this can be found throughout the letters and in John Conrad's recollection that his father would "cruise around" the family home if he saw his wife or one of his children reading a book, "and pounce on it if we put it down while we went out of the room." He continues: "When we returned the book had vanished and could not be found; most mysterious until we realised what was happening. A day or so later the book reappeared in exactly the same place from which it had vanished, and open at exactly the same page" (J. Conrad 1981: 167). Conrad the reader, then, emerges from his son's memoir as combining a voracious appetite for books with fastidiousness about which books he was prepared to associate himself with. This mixture of private inclusiveness and public purism in Conrad's attitude to literature is a dichotomy the following chapters will explore.

"Purism" is a suggestive word in this context, as Peter D. McDonald's illuminating analysis has positioned Conrad in the early years of his writing career as a "committed purist" seeking to break into the more exclusive regions of the literary

[4] Watts-Dunton's *roman-à-clef* about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, *Aylwin* (1898) was described by Conrad in this letter as "a curiosity success".

'field' of the 1890s. McDonald's application of Pierre Bourdieu's 'Field Theory' to Conrad, Arnold Bennett and Arthur Conan Doyle, and his analysis of their relationships with publishers, literary agents, and other agents in the literary field, has provided a valuable portrait of Conrad the author responding to the requirements of both the market – or rather markets – for literature and the influential figures who made, broke, and shaped reputations, such as the editor W.E. Henley, whose *New Review* serialized *The Nigger of the Narcissus* in 1897. Although he acknowledges that Conrad became more accommodating to the mass market with works such as *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), parts of which were serialized in the mass-circulation *Daily Mail*, McDonald asserts that this was a departure from his earlier "committed" purism: "In the early years he would not willingly have produced such 'bosh', as he called it, and he would have resisted being seen in these publications" [i.e. the *Daily Mail* and the *Strand*, which Conrad considered as a potential outlet for 'Gaspar Ruiz' (1906)] (McDonald 1997: 27). McDonald, therefore, constructs a portrait of Conrad the artist in the 1890s as a high-minded, aesthetically pure idealist, distancing himself from "profiteers" such as Allen, Corelli, and Caine in order to establish what Conrad himself referred to as his "literary reputation" (McDonald 1997: 24).

Conrad's Christmas 1898 letter can be read as his own analysis of the contemporary literary field and its purists and profiteers. The latter do not belong to what Conrad views as "literature": their readers are "philistines", and their "thought is commonplace and the style (?) without any distinction". They achieve their success, Conrad suggests, by a combination of marketing by others ("they are also puffed in the press"), self-publicity (Hall Caine is "the great master of self-advertising"), and a knack of expressing "the common thought" so that "the common man is delighted to find himself in accord with people he supposes distinguished" (*CL*2 137). However, a rather different perspective is revealed by Conrad's participation in an extraordinary

piece of amateur theatre which took place a year later at Christmas 1899, arranged by the American expatriate novelist Stephen Crane at Brede School House, near Crane's home in East Sussex. Conrad contributed a single line – "This is a jolly cold world" – to Crane's project, a comic play entitled *The Ghost*, alongside contributions from Henry James, Robert Barr, George Gissing, H. Rider Haggard, H.B. Marriott-Watson, H.G. Wells, Edwin Pugh, A.E.W. Mason, and Crane himself. Several of the writers, including Conrad, attended a Christmas and New Year party at Crane's house, and some of these acted parts in the play. As Nicholas Daly comments:

> What strikes us now is the collocation of 'significant' writers (James, Conrad, perhaps Wells) with writers whom we associate with a very different brand of literature (Haggard, Mason, Barr). What, we might ask, are the authors of such proto-modernist works as *The Golden Bowl* and *Heart of Darkness* doing, collaborating and socializing with the writers of *King Solomon's Mines* and that archetypal imperial melodrama, *The Four Feathers*? (Daly 1999: 3)

For Daly, this event was as much a publicity stunt as amateur theatre – notices appeared in national and local newspapers as well as the highbrow journal, *The Academy* – so this "collocation" seems to undermine McDonald's thesis that Conrad in the 1890s was carefully nurturing a purist literary reputation. Daly sees the "chasm between two distinct literary cultures" that opened up in subsequent decades as "scarcely more than a crack in 1899", citing as evidence the fact that the collaborators on *The Ghost* "wrote for the same magazines, were published by the same houses, and, in the case of the men at least, sometimes belonged to the same clubs." Daly adds: "While the popular late Victorian adventure romance may look forward to the modern bestseller, then, it appeared in a literary market that was still comparatively undifferentiated" (Daly 1999: 4). There is much to argue with in Daly's interpretation that most of the period's profound changes in literary culture were yet to happen, but

his evidence shows that the literary field of the 1890s may not have been so clearly segmented, and Conrad's place in it so clearly defined, as McDonald suggests.

"Something magazine'ish"

Daly's view that the literary market at the time was "comparatively undifferentiated" overlooks, however, several factors including the market-segmentation effect of newspapers and magazines as carriers of fiction, exemplified by the magazine whose collected editions were given to John Conrad as Christmas presents. *The Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*) was (contrary to John Conrad's recollection) a weekly newspaper, priced at 1d, founded by the Religious Tract Society in 1879 with the aim of providing a more wholesome alternative to the 'penny dreadfuls' on which Britain's youth was presumed by the Society to be spending its pocket money. In an astute move, the Society studied the market for juvenile fiction before launching the magazine, with the result, as Peter Keating records, "that the 'healthy' fictional offering in the first number of *BOP* was not, as might have been expected, a goody-goody tale, but 'My First Football Match' by 'An Old Boy', a pseudonym for Talbot Baines Read whose school stories established both *BOP* and a new fashion in school stories" (Keating 1989: 37). *BOP* was one of many new magazines founded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, responding both to developments in printing, communication, and legislation (Advertisement Duty, Stamp Duty, and Paper Duty were all repealed between 1853 and 1860) and to a massive increase in the demand for reading matter (Keating 1989: 33-35). This increased demand was itself the effect of increased literacy resulting from W. E. Forster's Elementary Education Act of 1870 and further educational reforms between 1872 and 1891, as well as important social factors such as the growth of suburbs and the consequent rise of commuting, new kinds of clerical work for men and increasingly women, and greater regulation

governing working hours which resulted in increased leisure time. As the narrator of Wells's *The War in the Air* (1908) puts it, reviewing the rush of social, scientific, and political changes which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century: "Never before had there been such reading masses" (Wells 1973: 229).

The extent to which magazines satisfied this massive increase in demand is shown by the extraordinary growth in their number, as recorded by the Newspaper Press Directory: the modest total of 643 magazines in 1875 more than doubled in ten years to 1,298 in 1885, then almost doubling again to 2,081 in 1895, followed by a levelling-off in the Edwardian decade – at the outbreak of the first World War there were 2,504 (Keating 1989: 33-35). Many of these magazines were religious, technical, or specialist, but fiction was a staple element of those that aimed at a wide readership: W.T. Stead, launching his *Review of Reviews* in 1890, had noted that "three-fourths of periodical literature consists of fiction" (qtd. Keating 1989: 38). Three types of magazines were especially significant carriers of fiction. First was the "miscellany" periodical, which included fiction (short stories or serials) alongside articles of general interest, such as biographies of notable people, features about fashion, or articles explaining developments in science. The most notable and probably successful magazine of this type was the *Strand* (1891), established by the publisher George Newnes, in which it was editorial policy to illustrate every page with a line drawing or, from the mid-1890s, a photograph: designed to be attractive to the eye as well as to the mind, the *Strand* set a new standard of popular periodical literature, and thereby maintained circulation figures of around half a million (Symons 1974: 66). After the *Strand* came the *Idler* (1892); *Pall Mall* (1893); *Windsor Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly for Men and Women* (1895) which published some of Arnold Bennett's more light-hearted serials such as *The Loot of Cities* (1905), the second series of Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt saga (1895), and Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky* series (1898);

Pearson's (1896) which serialized Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1897); *Temple* (1896); *Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial* (1898); *John Bull* (1906); and *Nash's* (1909) (Keating 1989: 35, Scholes 2006: 168).

The *Strand* was not Newnes's first publishing venture. A decade previously he had founded *Tit-Bits*, the exemplar of a second important group of periodicals which, "in an attempt to reach even greater numbers of readers, discarded any interest in quality of content or format, and lowered their prices still further, to 2d, 1d, or even ½d" (Keating 1989: 36). As well as prompting Alfred Harmsworth to launch his own rival publication in 1888, *Answers*, *Tit-Bits* had a significant and not entirely welcome impact on literary culture: this is the periodical read by that most unlettered Edwardian, Artie Kipps, and satirized as *Chit Chat* in George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891).[5] It is not difficult to see why a literary purist such as Gissing would have found a magazine devoted to the sensational, the trivial, and the entertaining, all in short items designed to appeal to a mass readership – it was selling 600,000 copies per week by 1893 (Nash 2011: 9) – hard to take. Nevertheless, *Tit-Bits* and its fiction, which was sometimes the product of readers' competitions, is further evidence that the literary field in the period cannot reliably and clearly be divided between purists and profiteers. One notable example of profiteering was the outcome of a *Tit-Bits* competition in 1891, with prize money of £1,000, for the best light serial story by a *Tit-Bits* reader. "The consequence was unexpected, appalling, and overwhelming. More than twenty thousand manuscripts came in – proof if ever there was proof of the literary longings nurtured by the amelioration of literary calamity" (Hepburn 1968: 18). The identity of the winning author was even more extraordinary than the number of entries, for it was the profiteer despised by Conrad, Grant Allen, who added the

[5] Kipps "never read a book, there were none for him to read, […] he never read any newspapers except, occasionally, *Tit-Bits* or a ha'penny 'comic'" (Wells 1993: 33).

prize money to his already sizeable literary earnings. Allen was then parodied by one who would come to be regarded as the consummate literary professional, Arnold Bennett, who won a further twenty guinea prize for the best response to Allen's entry (Hepburn 1968: 19). Moreover, we might expect to find authors such as Conrad, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf sharing Gissing's disdain for *Tit-Bits*, and indeed Leopold Bloom famously uses a page of the magazine carrying the prize story as lavatory paper in *Ulysses* (1922). However, Joyce, Woolf and, it appears, Conrad all submitted stories to the magazine which were rejected, Conrad submitting an early version of 'The Black Mate', possibly in response to a competition asking for stories from sailors (Stape 2007: 161, Carabine 1988).

The third type, emerging in the Edwardian decade, was the magazine devoted entirely to fiction, such as *The Story-Teller* (1907) and later *Hutchinson's Magazine* (1919). These also suggest a greater complexity in the literary field of the period than that suggested by McDonald or the more simplistic analysis by John Carey (1992). As Andrew Nash has shown, these magazines published work by both purists and profiteers:

> Indeed, given the cultural divisions which have come to be associated with the literary sphere after the war, a glance at the contents of these magazines can reveal some surprising symmetries. *Hutchinson's Magazine*, issued at 9d, serialized Conrad's final, incomplete novel, 'Suspense', and D. H. Lawrence also published a couple of stories, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Charles Garvice, Ethel M. Dell, and Warwick Deeping. (Nash 2011: 10)

Magazines in all three categories provided a wealth of opportunity for emerging talents, such as Arthur Morrison, who wrote sketches for bicycling magazines and a story for *Tit-Bits* (Keating 1989: 38), before responding to the *Strand* Magazine's need for a new consulting detective by creating the *Martin Hewitt, Investigator* saga

after Conan Doyle tried to kill Sherlock Holmes in 1893. H.G. Wells also wrote "anonymous paragraphs, at 2/6d a time, for several of the new periodicals" (Keating 1989: 38) and commented in the introduction to *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories* (1911) that the opportunities created by the growth in magazines at the time meant that "no short story of the slightest distinction went for long unrecognised" (qtd. Keating 1989: 40).

Conrad's response to the magazine fiction market was initially hostile, and then selectively enthusiastic: having published his first two novels in volume form only, in 1899 he protested to David Meldrum, literary adviser to William Blackwood and Sons, that "I am not anxious to fling myself on sixpenny or even shilling magazines" (*CL*2 196). Conrad at this point preferred the more established, politically conservative, and self-consciously literary periodicals such as *Blackwood's Magazine* to the new, mass-market, populist ones. McDonald cites as evidence Conrad's "early resistance to being published in popular monthlies" such as *Pearson's*, whose advances he spurned in 1897 by refusing them 'The Return' which, he told his first publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, was "much too good to be thrown away where the *right people* won't see it" (*CL*1 405, qtd. in McDonald 1992: 24). This fastidiousness towards the magazine market in his early career was unsustainable, however, and McDonald shows Conrad changing his approach, in response partly to his worsening financial situation, and partly to his difficulty in writing *The Rescuer* (*CL*1 296). Conrad therefore wrote 'An Outpost of Progress', 'The Lagoon' and 'Karain' with magazine publication in mind: the first was intended for *Cosmopolis*, and published there in 1897, and the second and third for the *Cornhill* (although 'Karain' was instead taken by *Blackwood's*). Indeed, Conrad told his friend, the writer and radical politician R.B. Cunninghame Graham: "I am glad you like 'Karain'. I was afraid you would despise it. There's something

magazine'ish about it. Eh? It was written for Blackwood" (*CL*2 57). McDonald elucidates the financial value of these stories for the financially pressed author:

> The success of his strategy was soon apparent. Whereas he had received £20 for the full copyright of the 64,000 word *Almayer's Folly* (excluding French translation rights), and a £50 advance on a 12.5 per cent royalty for the book rights of *An Outcast* [*of the Islands*] (115,000 words), he was now able to earn up to £40 10s for a short story of only 9,500 words (a rate of 1s for 12 words). Even the average rate of 1s for 16 words for the magazine rights to the short stories published up to July 1897 was a tenfold improvement on the rate for *Almayer* (1s for 160). Yet if this change in direction brought a significant relative increase in his earnings, it did not go very far towards improving his gross income. For work published up to July 1897, his total income amounted to only £158 6s, which averaged out at £5 16s per month over the twenty-seven-month period from April 1895 to July 1897. That was 4s a month less than an average well-paid wage-earner could expect in the late 1890s. (McDonald 1997: 26)

Conrad therefore discovered that short stories for magazines were potentially more lucrative than longer works for book publication and so the former could, in effect, subsidize the latter, although Conrad still faced the problem of reconciling his potentially contradictory requirements for financial and literary capital: "As a newcomer, his need to produce more marketable work was in direct conflict with his more urgent need to establish his position in the field" (McDonald 1997: 27). He did this by positioning these early stories in publications at the more purist end of the periodical spectrum, and by thinking less of the magazine's readerships and more of what Bourdieu called the "symbolic brokers" (McDonald 1997: 20) in the literary field:

> In Conrad's case, these included William Blackwood (*Blackwood's*), Arthur Symons (*Savoy*), Frederick Ortmans (*Cosmopolis*), J. St Loe Strachey (*Cornhill*), and W.E. Henley (*New Review*), the magazine editors; fellow writers and reviewers such as R. B. Cunninghame Graham, H.G. Wells, Henry James, and Stephen Crane; and, most importantly, Edward Garnett, Unwin's reader. In their own way, and with various degrees of energy and involvement, this diverse group of 'select spirits' constituted the inner circle of Conrad's early peers who, by the process of what Bourdieu calls 'co-optation', established and confirmed his position in the literary field of the 1890s. (McDonald 1997: 24)

Conrad's approach in the 1890s appeared to succeed in retaining the respect of such 'select spirits', while failing to turn this to profitable account. David Meldrum, one of Conrad's early champions, wrote to William Blackwood in January 1899:

> But I find it no difficulty to understand Conrad's position. It surprises me that he can get along at all. His long story costs two years' work. He *may* get £400 out of it, not more. And we see what he does besides his long story – two or three short ones each year, bringing in at the most £100. That means that his total income from his work doesn't exceed £300 […] I think it very splendid of him to refuse to do any pot-boiling and hope, for him and for ourselves too, that it will pay him in the long run. (Blackburn 1958: 40)[6]

Clearly, Conrad's short fiction to this date had escaped the taint of "pot-boiling", although Meldrum's letter suggests that the exigencies of life in late-Victorian Britain risked forcing Conrad in that direction. Publishing Conrad, therefore, was as much a public service as a commercial proposition, and Meldrum emphasized to Blackwood the reputational advantage of having Conrad – and what Bourdieu would term his

[6] By contrast, Arnold Bennett estimated that a very successful, professional novelist, writing 150,000 words a year, would generate an annual income of £3,500. Bennett's wider point was that, in the Edwardian age, fiction was in a "boom" which offered sufficient "pecuniary rewards" to even the most "avaricious and exacting" writers – as long as they were sufficiently talented and hard-working (Bennett 1903: 25-26).

associated "cultural capital" – on his list, adding in December 1900: "I wish I could believe that he would ever be 'popular' in the popular sense, but he is too good for that" (Blackburn 1958: 122). As Keating observes, Conrad "was treated generously by Blackwood's who paid him £300 for the serialisation of *Lord Jim* (1900), and advanced £200 against a 1/- royalty (about 17.5%) on book sales. 2,100 copies of the novel were printed and sold, but four years later Blackwood's had still not made enough profit from the book to cover the advance" (Keating 1989: 428-29).

The value of McDonald's portrait of Conrad lies in its emphasis on the author as a literary professional, studying, assessing, and testing the markets for fiction, selecting publishers and magazines appropriate to his self-conceived position and worth, and adjusting subject and treatment to suit both markets and the tastes of the "symbolic brokers" like Henley. McDonald's analysis ends with the publication of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* in 1897, but we can continue his analysis by tracing Conrad's interaction with the literary field of the early twentieth century through some of the 1,200 letters he wrote to his agent J.B. Pinker from August 1899, when Conrad initially rejected Pinker's offer to act for him, until Pinker's death in February 1922. Conrad's first letter to Pinker is significant in again demonstrating the co-existence of the "unbusiness-like" literary purist and the professional author:

> My method of writing is so unbusiness-like that I don't think you could have any use for such an unsatisfactory person. I generally sell a work before it is begun, get paid when it is half done and don't do the other half till the spirit moves me. I must add that I have no control whatever over the spirit – neither has the man who has paid the money. […] I live in hopes of reformation and whenever that takes place you and you alone shall have the working of the New Conrad. Meantime I must be content to pander to my absurd weakness, and hobble along the line of the least resistance. (*CL*2 195)

Conrad can here be seen disclaiming any business-sense while describing his literary endeavours in starkly financial terms. In appearing simultaneously to accept and reject the commerce of literature, this letter points to a contradiction in Conrad's view of his own position in the literary field.

After engaging Pinker in September 1900 to place his second published collaboration with Hueffer, *Romance* (eventually published in 1903), the correspondence suggests that this combination of worldly professionalism and artistic fastidiousness persisted. Conrad's relationship with Pinker has often been presented as an exemplum of the administratively and financially chaotic artist supported (morally, artistically, and financially) by the astute literary professional – in contrast with Bennett's relationship with Pinker in which the two men's guile and commercial acumen were more evenly matched (Hepburn 1968: 90, Gillies 2007: 94). However, Conrad's instructions on handling *Romance* show that he was by no means uninterested in how money might be made from his fiction: while giving Pinker a "free hand", Conrad nevertheless instructed him to "serialize it and arrange for book form" and, in case Pinker had missed the point, Conrad hammered it home with a postscript: "The serializing is the important part" (*CL*2 294). We can infer that the importance of the serialization to Conrad was largely financial, but what is perhaps more significant is the impression we gain from this letter of Conrad keenly analysing and assessing the literary market-place, an impression strengthened by subsequent letters. In October 1900, Conrad asked Pinker to take on *Typhoon*, and in the following January he admitted he was disappointed by being offered a mere £75 for the story by *Pall Mall Magazine*, claiming that *Blackwood's Magazine* ('*Maga*'), had indicated that it was worth £100. Conrad's reason for rejecting *Blackwood's* is significant: "However I don't want to go to B for the present for many reasons – one of them being that I wish to reach another public than *Maga*'s" (*CL*2 320-21). Conrad can be seen, therefore,

courting neither what he would call, in his 'Author's Note' to *Chance*, "a limited coterie", nor an undifferentiated mass market. Rather, he was attuned to the existence of different readerships, and therefore different markets, and directed his agent's attention to those that could support either his financial needs, or his literary reputation, or both. As Stephen Donovan comments on the placing of *Typhoon* in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, "Conrad's choice of what he later called a 'popular sixpenny' (*CL*5 257) attests to his determination to 'reach' a middle-brow literary mainstream to which *Cosmopolis*, *Savoy* and *Blackwood's*, with their smaller circulation and niche audiences, could not give him entry" (Donovan 2005: 177).[7]

What follows in the Conrad-Pinker correspondence is a series of variations on this theme, with Conrad's attention to the characteristics of publishing houses and, more particularly, magazines ebbing and flowing in accordance, perhaps, with his financial situation. For example, January 1903 found Conrad considering a syndication deal for *Nostromo* (1904).[8] Syndication, pioneered in Britain by the Bolton-based firm of Tillotson's in the late-nineteenth century, was one of the most lucrative forms of publication, and was particularly associated with popular fiction as the publications receiving syndicated fiction were mostly provincial newspapers. On 5 January Conrad wrote to Pinker that *Nostromo* "will do for the Kendal people" – the Northern Newspaper Syndicate which had approached Conrad with an offer the previous year (*CL*3 5-6). Two weeks later, a disgruntled Conrad advised Pinker that his new novel should only be sold to the syndicate if it relaxed its restrictive conditions: "I will not

[7] Donovan's website *Conrad First* (www.conradfirst.com) provides a rich picture of both the range and number of magazines and newspapers which published Conrad's work.

[8] While the thought of one of Conrad's most complex and demanding novels receiving its first publication in the provincial Cumbrian press might be surprising, the same letter reminds us that Conrad was already in a business relationship with the period's most successful and experienced syndicator of fiction, S.S.McClure, whose American operation embraced syndication, magazine publication ('The Brute' was published in *McClure's* in 1907), and book publication (it published the US editions of *Lord Jim* and *Youth* amongst others).

bind myself in any way which will prevent me from publishing serially elsewhere when it is convenient for me to do so while my story is running in their papers. The clause is impossible. Practically it would tie my hands for nine months at least" (*CL*3 11). Even though Conrad admitted that he did not produce fiction at a sufficient rate for this restrictive clause to become an issue, he still regarded it as "impossible", suggesting that his objection was more on principled than practical grounds. He went on to warn Pinker that the syndicate should not expect "photos and biographical details either. I don't intend to furnish them" (*CL*3 10-11).

At this point, therefore, Conrad was open to the mass-marketing of his fiction, but on his terms. In particular, the marketing of the author, as opposed to the work itself, was evidently something he found distasteful, in contrast to some of the profiteers of the period – including, in Conrad's view, Hall Caine. Subsequent letters however show Conrad becoming more relaxed about giving into the requirements of magazines. "As his literary reputation grew, Conrad found himself in the enviable position of being wooed by publishers of mediocre but profitable magazines who wanted to use his name to bolster their undistinguished contributor lists", such as *Hampton's Magazine*, *Pictorial Review*, and *London Magazine* (Donovan 2005: 174). As an illustration of his accommodation with the commercial demands of magazine publication, Conrad told Pinker in January 1906 that he preferred 'Gestures' to 'The Informer' as the title of his new story, making the possibly sarcastic remark: "But of course don't let my wish interfere with the demands of serialization" (*CL*3 305). Sarcastic or not, *Harper's Magazine*'s preference has endured as the story's title. By the time *The Secret Agent* was receiving its US serialization, in *Ridgway's* ('A Militant Weekly for God and Country'), later the same year, Conrad appeared positively insouciant: "*Ridgways* are sending me their rag. It's awful – and it don't matter in the least. I see they are 'editing' the stuff pretty severely" (*CL*3 368-69). Conrad may have

been less concerned about the American literary field than the British one, except as a source of revenue, but it is also clear throughout the correspondence that, with respect to magazine publication, Conrad combined elements of both 'profiteer' and 'purist', and the balance between them shifted over time.

It would be a mistake, however, to see a linear progression from purist to partial profiteer. In 1908, Conrad became focused on Hueffer's magazine project, *The English Review*, the "definite design" of which Hueffer declared to be "giving imaginative literature a chance in England" (Mizener 1971 qtd. *CL*4 125), and which Conrad described to his French translator, Henry Davray, as "*expérimentale*" (*CL*4 141). Conrad's contributions to the first issue included a review of Anatole France's *L'Ile des pingouins* and the first instalment of his *Some Reminiscences*, which he described to Pinker as an ambitious attempt "[t]o make Polish life enter English literature" and an appropriate project given the state of his "literary reputation" (*CL*4 138). Although Conrad's involvement was partly motivated by friendship (which ended, at least for a time, with an acrimonious breach the following year, partly caused by Hueffer's management of the *Review*'s funding), it also associated Conrad's name and work with an early example of the magazine format being developed into a distinctively purist vehicle, one which inspired a generation of other short-lived, similar projects that are now credited with being crucibles of literary modernism (Saunders 1996: 248-49). Hueffer's intention was to use the *English Review* to develop new talent and also to provide an outlet for work by established writers which would be unlikely to find favour with established sectors of the market – as illustrated by Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909), which was turned down by several publishers before Wells offered it for serialization to Hueffer (Ford 1971: 230). Conrad described *Tono-Bungay* to Davray as Wells's "serious novel" (*CL*4 142), and other "serious" company for Conrad's pieces in the first issue was Henry James's story 'The Jolly Corner', an

item of social analysis by R.B. Cunninghame Graham, and a translation, by Constance Garnett, of Tolstoy's 'The Raid'.

"Getting his sales"

Magazines were not the only response to the changed conditions for literature in the period. As Nicola Wilson (2011) has explained, between 1880 and 1940 the novel was transformed physically and commercially from an expensive and bulky object that was usually borrowed into a lighter, shorter and portable object that was cheap enough to be widely purchased. The three-volume novel – priced at 10/6d per volume, and totalling 31/6d – disappeared within a remarkably short period: 1894 saw 184 novels published in this format but, three years later, this had dropped to a mere four. What brought this remarkable change about was a *volte-face* by the circulating libraries. Mudie's Select Library had used its influence over publishers to ensure that most novels were published in three volumes for most of the Victorian period; however, Mudie's and its rival, the circulating library and bookseller W.H. Smith, realized in the 1890s that the three-volume system was economically unsustainable (Keating 1989: 25-26). On the supply side, "[i]ncreased paper production and technological advances facilitated higher printing capacities", enabling the production of more new novels as well as more cheap and affordable reprints, while "the expansion of the popular press and the development of newspaper syndication increased outlets for serial fiction"; on the demand side, "the spread of elementary education and the introduction of free libraries widened the reading public; and the implementation of international copyright law expanded the market for British books overseas" (Nash 2011: 3). The resulting growth in the production of fiction was, as Andrew Nash concludes, "startling": "Three hundred and eighty new novels were published in 1880; by 1891 this figure had risen to 896 and in 1895, one year after the

libraries effectively destroyed the three-volume novel, it was 1,315" (2011: 3). This development changed more than the physical form and price of new fiction. The three-decker had imposed an artificial requirement on authors to conform to conventions of length and format, and it also dictated how their work was read. Few readers could afford to buy novels at 31/6d, so new fiction had been the almost exclusive preserve of the same circulating libraries that went on to finish off the form. While the three-decker reigned, so did Mudie's and Smith's, and the suppressive effect of their control of supply has been well-documented, exemplified by their refusal to stock challenging novels such as George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894): "The adjective 'select' in Mudie's title had been carefully chosen to reassure timid subscribers that they had nothing to fear from the books they ordered, and the moral control that the word 'select' promised was continuously exercised: W.H. Smith followed a similar policy" (Keating 1989: 24).

The promise of a new dispensation was therefore welcomed by the younger, more experimental novelists who had been frustrated by such editorial policies: "The replacement of the 31/6d three-decker by the 6/- one-volume novel had been welcomed by many novelists and younger publishers precisely because it represented a movement away from their reliance on book-borrowing to a book-buying public" (Keating 1989: 404). The new availability and affordability of books was sufficiently obvious to be pointed out by Wells's priggish autodidact, Chester Coote, who tells Kipps: "Nothing enlarges the mind […] like Travel and Books…. And they're both so easy nowadays, and so cheap!" (1993: 131). One of the paradoxes of this development, however, is that while the new format permitted a much greater variety in form and subject, Britain did not, on the whole, become a nation of book-buyers: "even after the collapse of the three-volume form, when new novels sold at the more reasonable price of 6s or 7s 6d, the British public much preferred to borrow books rather than to buy

them" (Wilson 2011: 37). As Keating has pointed out, the "low priority given to the purchase of books by middle-class families is strikingly apparent in the large number of household budgets compiled by professional and amateur sociologists at this time" (Keating 1989: 407).

What did break down – albeit gradually – was the duopoly exercised by Mudie's and Smith's, and "it was the growing public library movement that offered the ordinary reader access to what was in effect a new kind of literary culture through the free provision of new and recently published full-length novels" (Wilson 2011: 38). Although the spread of libraries called into being by the 1850 Public Libraries Act was extremely slow, by the outbreak of the First World War, 570 free public libraries had been established, and, as Wilson remarks, "the lower-middle and 'respectable' working classes" found themselves with "unprecedented access to the contemporary novel." New commercial libraries also brought fiction into the British high street in unprecedented quantities. The Boots Booklovers' Library (founded 1900) was one of the most notable of the new outlets, "heavily patronized by the expanding middle and lower-middle classes – businessmen and travellers, teachers, civil servants, housewives, and the new ranks of office clerks like the fictional Leonard Bast" (Wilson 2011: 39). As Wilson explains, these new libraries had "a huge effect on the fiction market. Unlike the public libraries, which had limited budgets and educational agendas, the circulating libraries were commercial firms with large funds, centralized purchasing policies, and national patterns of distribution." Libraries such as Boots, rather than individual readers, "were the most important and significant purchasers of the novels that were produced during the years 1880 to 1940. This gave them great sway in the minds of publishers and many authors" (Wilson 2011: 39).

Conrad, therefore, entered a literary field in the 1890s that was undergoing transformational change, especially with regard to the opportunities for literary

'profiteers'. A "committed purist" would presumably have been appalled rather than excited by developments such as the growth in public and commercial libraries, and the increased production of books. A purist disdain for the expanded reading public does emerge from some of his correspondence, such as his 1897 letter to his childhood friend, Baroness Janina de Brunnow in which he expressed his contempt for the "all-powerful masses" (*CL*1 390). However, his correspondence with Pinker reveals a more complex picture. For example, shortly after he asked Pinker to take on *Typhoon*, he advised his new agent to ensure the new work received sufficient publicity: "I wish, whatever publisher you capture, could be induced to make a certain amount of fuss about the story 'Mr. J Conrad's new tale *Typhoon* begins in … etc etc' That kind of thing. The public's so used to the guidance of Advertis[e]ment! Why! even I myself feel the spell of such emphasis" (*CL*2 318-19). Conrad, therefore, was keen to stimulate demand for his work in the reading public, even at the cost of his purist anxieties about publicity.

In 1903, when working on *Nostromo*, Conrad revealed his knowledge of the continuing power of the established circulating libraries in the context of establishing his position in the market: "Naturally we cannot expect a fortune out of *Youth*. Mudie and Smith have not yet been captured; but a beginning has been made with the "Trade" and I look upon my position as distinc[t]ly improved" (*CL*3 6). The telling word is "yet", and Conrad's interest in his position in relation to the circulating libraries was confirmed in November the following year when he wrote optimistically to Pinker that he had been told "in two places and also at Mudies (City)" that *Nostromo* was "doing well", and that there was "demand for *Lord Jim* since the other was published" (*CL*3 181-82). By 1907, there is evidence in the Conrad-Pinker correspondence of a further tilt towards profiteering, as that year's publication of *The Secret Agent* by Methuen appeared to prompt new ambitions for popularity on Conrad's part; he repeatedly

considers his fiction in terms of subject and treatment, and appears here to oscillate between attributing potential for popularity to one and then the other. On 13 April, Conrad wrote, "I am very much possessed by the idea of striking a blow for popularity" (*CL*3 431-32). On 6 May, he asked Pinker whether Methuen considered that *The Secret Agent* "has any chance of getting at the public? […] I am thinking as I've told you before of striking a blow for popularity" (*CL*3 434-35). On 18 May, Conrad instructed Pinker to refuse any request from Methuen for an author's photograph, but this purist manoeuvre was immediately followed by a rather involved meditation on *The Secret Agent*'s "element of popularity": "By this I don't mean to say that the thing is likely to be popular. I merely think that it shows traces of capacity for that sort of treatment which may make a novel popular." Conrad appears to suggest here that, in writing of *The Secret Agent*, he had learnt some techniques that could be applied profitably (in every sense) to a future project – which he goes on to explain he will commence after the completion of *Chance*: "As I've told you my mind runs very much on popularity just now. I would try to reach it not by sensationalism but by means of taking a widely discussed subject for the text of my novel." Such subjects include, he suggested, "war and peace and labour" which he intended to treat "with a sufficiently interesting story, whose notion has come into my head lately. And of course to treat them from a modern point of view" (*CL*3 438-40). "Modern" is clearly a keyword, one that Conrad had previously used in a frequently quoted letter of 31 May 1902 to William Blackwood in which he defines himself as an innovator and an artist rather than a mere producer;[9] on 30 July 1907 he added to this growing corpus of artistic theory by defining what he thought made his fiction distinctive, even inimitable:

[9] "I am *modern*" (*CL*2 418). See also p. 317 below.

> *Chance* itself will be altogether different in tone and treatment of course, but it will be saleable I believe. […] Of course it will not be on popular lines. Nothing of mine can be, I fear. But even Meredith ended by getting his sales. […] One may read everybody and yet in the end want to read me – for a change if nothing else. For I don't resemble anybody; and yet I am not specialised enough to call up imitators as to matter or style. There is nothing in me but a turn of mind which whether valuable or worthless can not be imitated. (*CL*3 459-60)

Conrad self-contradictions here are striking: disavowing populism, he nevertheless seems to hanker for popularity, but what clearly matters most is distinctiveness. The relationship between distinctiveness, subject, treatment, and popularity will be a salient concern of the chapters that follow.

What, though, does popularity actually mean, and how can it be assessed in a period of profound change in markets, readers, and publishing? "Sales" might have meant different things for Meredith, whose novels mostly fell in the three-decker era, and Conrad, who entered the literary field after the three-decker's decline. For the Victorian novelist,

> the number of novels taken by the circulating libraries was crucial because it served to establish his market worth and increased his negotiating power. In modern best-selling terms the figures seem absurdly small, but the artificially high price of novels, and the security which a large order from the libraries entailed, made possible the substantial advances to popular writers. (Keating 1989: 24)

With new novels retailing at 6/- (before discounts) after 1894, a novel had to sell in greater volumes to become a 'best-seller' and thereby earn its author substantial advances or royalties: "Merely to cover the costs of production a 6/- novel had to sell five hundred copies" (Keating 1989: 427). Referring to the purist author-hero of Gissing's *New Grub Street*, Keating comments that "an early twentieth-century

Reardon might have considered himself lucky to get £30 for one thousand copies of his novel, but the more important point is that he would have been luckier still to even sell that number, while the five thousand copies which would bring him £150 was barely conceivable" (Keating 1989: 426-27). For most of his career, Conrad's sales hovered below this barely conceivable level at around 4,000 copies of the English edition of each novel; yet even the relative commercial success of *Chance* – sales of the English edition reached 13,000 (Seville 2011: 33-34) – were a fraction of what could be sold by a best-selling author, such as the unnamed ten authors whom Arnold Bennett estimated "can count on receiving at least four thousand pounds for any long novel they choose to write", or the several "who have made, and may make again, twenty thousand pounds from a single book" (Bennett 1903: 26).

Sales figures provide an index of popularity but they do not tell the full story in this period when borrowing rather than buying was the public's main method of accessing books, as libraries as well as magazines and newspaper syndication exerted a 'multiplier' effect on the consumption of fiction. The public libraries were seen by some purists in library administration and management as an opportunity to correct the tastes of the reading public, as can be demonstrated by an analysis of library stocks by the Chief Librarian at Woolwich Public Libraries, Ernest A. Baker, in 1907 – an analysis that provides a valuable snapshot of literary taste in the period. Recalling a debate over whether libraries should stock fiction at all, Baker comments that "genuine literature should not only be admitted to our libraries, but duplicated over and over again, and introduced to new readers by every means in our power; but that the sensational, the unliterary and the ephemeral novel, which of course outnumbers the former a hundredfold in the book market, should be ignominiously rejected" (Baker 1970: 70). In order to test whether this high-minded precept was being observed, Baker had surveyed an undisclosed number of "leading" public libraries to discover

how many books by a selected list of novelists they stocked. Baker then categorized the returns into a first group comprising "genuine literature", that is, authors "who, in my opinion, should all be well represented in every public library", a second group of "popular mediocrities and doubtful cases" who "ought to be represented by a small and careful selection of their works, or left out altogether", and a third group who should be rejected by a "rate-supported library, if there is no undue surrender to popular demands of a frivolous nature" (Baker 1970: 72). The result of Baker's analysis is worth reproducing in full as it includes both Conrad and a number of the popular writers considered in the following chapters:

Author	**Aggregate number of copies of works**	**Average per library**
CLASS I		
Balzac	426	20
Björnson	123	6
Conrad	153	7
Georg Ebers	135	6
Howells	322	15
Henry James	353	17
Meredith	390	19
Walter Raymond	83	4
Stockton	421	20
Turgenev	109	5
Mrs Wiggin	150	7
Total	*2,665*	*126*
Average per author	*242*	*11*
CLASS II		
Frank Barrett	337	16
Fergus Hume	563	27
Cutcliffe Hyne	246	11

Author	**Aggregate number of copies of works**	**Average per library**
Oppenheim	275	13
Ouida	721	33
Braddon	2,296	109
Corelli	822	39
Mrs Henry Wood	1,903	91
Mrs Lovat Cameron	321	15
Worboise	1,617	77
'Lucas Cleeve'	262	12
Mrs Hungerford	785	37
Total	*10, 148*	*480*
Average per author	*846*	*40*
	CLASS III	
Guy Boothby	899	45
Dick Donovan	322	15
J.E. Muddock	252	12
Nat Gould	162	8
Evans Wilson	85	4
Gunter	241	11
Le Queux	586	28
Holme Lee	158	7
Florence Marryat	568	27
Rita	599	28
Dora Russell	200	10
R.H. Savage	281	13
T.W. Speight	230	11
Annie Thomas	275	13
Curtis Yorke	341	16
Total	*5,199*	*248*
Average per author	*347*	*17*

Baker concludes by deploring what he saw as the failure of the library system to live up to the ideals of its founders, and the libraries' role in creating or supporting "ephemeral", popular literature, such as Boothby, Braddon and Wood: "the promoters of the Public Library Acts never sanctioned the expenditure of our resources on fattening the purses of such authors or their publishers, or on pampering morbid and unintelligent appetites with this kind of literary nutriment" (Baker 1970: 77).

Baker's table shows that, far from being (as Daly suggests) "comparatively undifferentiated", the literary market in the period was not only stratified but also was seen to be so. It is also instructive about both the Edwardian literary field and Conrad's position within it. Baker's Class II authors are those whose books were the most borrowed from public libraries, and the presence at the top of the list of Mrs Henry Wood and M.E. Braddon, Victorian writers of three-volume melodramas, suggests, as we would expect, that the most successful authors in the public library system were those who combined popularity with a degree of respectability. Although the public libraries had not entirely met the paternalistic aspirations of their founders to provide "a public space […] in order to foster self-improvement for the good of the individual", and had to compromise in order to meet "the need to keep up borrower numbers" (Hammond 2006: 23-24, 34), most public libraries nevertheless were governed by administrators and librarians who believed in supporting a fictional canon "largely comprised of light but morally blameless contemporary novels and serious, male-authored classics" (Hammond 2006: 31).

What strikes us today is that, despite Baker's disappointment at the showing of Class I authors, literary purists such as Meredith and James have a higher representation than many in Classes II and III, such as the very popular E. Phillips Oppenheim. This shows that, while public libraries had to make an accommodation with popular taste, helping to shape it and being shaped by it, there was no simple,

direct equivalence of popularity in the library system and in the market-place. In Conrad's case, however, the table suggests that his lack of commercial popularity *was* reflected in library stocks in 1907. Indeed, stocks of Conrad's novels are not only significantly lower than those of populists such as Guy Boothby and Oppenheim, but also lower than the average author in Baker's Class I: in the whole list of 38, only five authors had fewer volumes in Baker's sample. Against that is the remarkable fact of Conrad's presence in Class I in the first place. Although Conrad shared these laurels with, for example, the now very obscure Somerset writer Walter Raymond, it is clear that, only twelve years after publication of his first novel, an influential custodian of public taste (who went on to write a ten-volume history of the English novel) considered Conrad to have achieved sufficient literary distinction – presumably as a result of his interaction with "symbolic brokers" in the literary field – to earn a place in the literary canon, alongside American and European nineteenth-century authors of global significance. Had Conrad read Baker's article, he might have regretted the discovery that, having failed to capture the commercial libraries, he had also failed to capture the public libraries, while taking comfort from the high opinion of Ernest A. Baker which could provide not only symbolic capital immediately, but also, through his influence on public libraries' budgets, financial capital in the future. The public library system at this time, therefore, illustrates the dilemma for a writer temperamentally inclined to purism but with the literary professional's need to make a living: investing in the symbolic capital of a literary reputation is unlikely to bring immediate and substantial financial rewards, while becoming a profiteer would entail sacrificing not only symbolic capital but also, potentially, the longer-term commercial returns of the kind which, as Conrad optimistically noted, eventually accrued to Meredith once his purism had been converted into canonical security.

"A widely discussed subject"

One of the most significant words in Baker's analysis is "ephemeral", which he brackets with "sensational" and "unliterary" to describe those novels that "should be ignominiously rejected" by the public library system (1970: 70). Class III is presumably "ephemeral", and we infer that Class I – not least because of the preponderance of writers from the previous century – comprises fiction of permanent value. Conrad similarly associates quality with longevity in his Christmas 1898 letter: "There are no lasting qualities" in the work of Allen, Corelli, and Caine. A superficial writer, in Conrad's view, can appeal to the passing interests and fashions to become momentarily successful, while writers who go deeper into the human condition may only be rewarded in the long run. Baker's list might appear today to bear this out, with authors whose works remain in print and on academic syllabuses in Class I, and Classes II and III being populated by authors who have been almost forgotten and whose works, with perhaps the single exception of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), are now out-of-print. (It is of course also obvious that half of the names in Class I would be unknown to all but the deepest specialists in nineteenth-century literature.) What lies behind the word "ephemeral" is important for the chapters that follow. If fiction is popular because it is of its particular moment (rather than simply because it uses techniques designed to be pleasurable for the largest possible number of readers) then we would expect it to be concerned with topical subjects. This is precisely what interests Conrad in his correspondence with Pinker in May 1907, in which he discloses his search for a "widely discussed subject" for the "text" of a future, popular novel.

As the following chapters will show, topicality *was* a feature of popular fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as can be seen both in specific works that responded at least in part to public enthusiasms and anxieties, and in the

origins and development of popular genres. My purpose in demonstrating the responsiveness of popular fiction to historical factors is not merely to provide helpful contexts to explain why genres developed the way they did; more importantly, it provides a line of enquiry to examine whether and how Conrad also responded to topical subjects. I shall therefore examine whether Conrad deployed character types and tropes associated with genres, and if so, why – whether it was for primarily aesthetic purposes, to transform or subvert generic models and create artistically challenging, modernist texts, or whether Conrad was, instead, reflecting contemporary concerns, consciously or otherwise, to provide his agent and publishers with texts that were, at least potentially, commercially viable. Topicality is also relevant to Field Theory's analysis of what Bourdieu calls "cultural production". For Bourdieu, "heteronomous producers", operating in the mass-market, tend to serve the interests of "the dominant fractions of the dominant class", while "autonomous producers" define themselves in opposition to those dominant political and economic interests (Bourdieu 1993: 41). From this we might expect that popular fiction would concern itself with "widely discussed" subjects – the urgent social, political, and economic questions of the day – and provide answers that suited the interests of "the dominant class". "Autonomous producers" – which is how Conrad clearly positioned himself in his published statements of artistic intent – would presumably ignore those questions, insisting that the novel operates in the pure atmosphere of art.[10] Conrad's approach to topical subjects, therefore – on which his private and public pronouncements again appeared to diverge – may provide indicators of his position in the literary field, and offer points of comparison with his purist and profiteering contemporaries, so I shall examine Conrad's response not only to these subjects but also the ideological debates

[10] Hampson (2012b: 578), drawing on Bourdieu, presents Conrad and James as autonomous artists, "distrusting art's subjection to any demands on it dictated from outside the realm of fiction". This reading of Conrad's position will be challenged in this thesis.

that occurred around them. This is also part of my wider examination of Conrad's appropriation of themes and tropes from genre fiction, and the relationship between this appropriation and his literary distinctiveness. I will seek to show in Chapters 1 and 2 that detective fiction took on some of its characteristics in response to broader social changes such as the expansion of the professions, the social effects of science and technology, and the implications of bureaucratised methods of policing for what would today be called 'civil liberties'; these chapters will then explore how Conrad manages the same themes in *The Secret Agent*, and with what technical and aesthetic results. Chapter 2 also begins to examine espionage fiction, which is, with 'invasion scare' and 'future war' fiction, examined more extensively in Chapter 3; these sub-genres enabled a fictional examination of the escalating rivalry between the 'great powers' and the ethics of warfare and diplomacy which became issues of public as well as political concern. These chapters will examine how the tropes of detective and espionage fiction enabled Conrad's political analysis of liberty, dissent, and autocracy. Chapter 4 continues with espionage fiction and related sub-genres, including the so-called 'dynamite novel', which enabled fiction to confront political radicalism and terrorism, and to dramatize the changing balance between the individual and the state that was brought about by political and technological change. The chapter will compare the ideological positions of genre fiction and Conrad's novels, examining how *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* deal with the politics of dissent. Chapter 5 turns to financial crime, a surprisingly prevalent theme in the period's popular fiction, and a response to the transformation of the British economy effected by Victorian industrialization. The chapter examines Conrad's treatment of the theme in works such as *Chance*, and how it uses this theme to generate social criticism, comparing this with both popular and literary narratives handling similar themes.

The following chapters, therefore, seek to locate Conrad's position – or positions – in the literary field, principally on the purist-profiteer axis, through a comparative examination of what I have termed his urban fiction – the novels *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and *Chance* (1913), as well as short stories such as 'The Informer' (1906) and 'The Partner' (1911). I use the term 'urban' to describe these narratives to distinguish them from those with the more 'exotic' settings, such as *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *Lord Jim*, and *Youth* (1902), all of which have received significant critical attention with respect to their relationship with popular fiction. The 'urban'/'exotic' dichotomy is useful, I believe, because it reads across to genre: as Smith, Dryden, and Hampson (2000) have shown, Conrad's Malay and African-set fictions are responses to traditions of adventure narrative (both fictional and factual), and I argue that the narratives set in the cities of London, Geneva, and St. Petersburg respond to 'urban' genres such as detective and espionage fiction.

McDonald uses Bourdieu's models and focuses on Conrad's relationship with publishers and magazine editors to locate Conrad's position, working on evidence that is biographical and bibliographical as well as textual. Despite the acknowledgement of 'Field Theory' and use of biographical context in this introduction, my evidence in the following chapters is more exclusively textual, and my methodology is comparative: I place Conrad's texts side-by-side with numerous examples of popular fiction to determine how much they share and where and how they diverge. The originality of this study lies in the comparison of Conrad's work with texts and genres rarely, if ever, used in Conrad criticism; it also aspires to recover for critical attention texts which, because of their status as popular fiction or their obscurity, have remained largely or wholly unknown in literary and cultural studies. An underlying assumption of this study is that any of the period's genre or popular fiction is worth studying, not just the

canonical examples by much-studied authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker and H.G. Wells. By illuminating resemblances and differences, I will examine how Conrad exploited genre tropes to create something consciously distinctive and "modern", and to analyse what constitutes that distinctiveness and modernity. In doing so, I shall also examine assumptions that Conrad's relationship with popular fiction is a hierarchical one. Jeremy Hawthorn (2007: 152), for example, argues from Conrad's 1902 letter to William Blackwood that Conrad's fiction "involves the requisitioning of popular modes and subject matter (boys' stories) for more serious purposes". The assumptions implicit in the value statement of "more serious purposes" deserves, I believe, some investigation, something I shall attempt in the following chapters.

'Popular' is a term that also requires explanation: applying it to literature creates numerous problems of definition. Does 'popular' literature necessarily mean enjoyed by many people, and if so, how many is sufficient for a work of literature to qualify? Can a literary text be both popular and unpopular? (It may for example be 'generically marked' as detective fiction, and yet be commercially unsuccessful.) How can we know whether a text is popular, given that, as we have already seen, sales figures and library records, where they are available, do not tell us the whole story about how many people read a text, and whether they enjoyed it? Does a popular text have to be enjoyed at all, or can a text be successful commercially while not conforming to what we would expect from a popular work? And how do we account for different versions (e.g. serial and book form) in assessing popularity?

A few examples illustrate these definitional and analytical problems. Many of the late Victorian and Edwardian works I have examined are by authors who are now extremely obscure, including some who published little fiction, and what they did publish appears to have been commercially unsuccessful. Forgotten figures such as 'Skelton Kuppord' (the academic Sir John Adams), and B. Fletcher Robinson, a

journalist who collaborated with P.G. Wodehouse and with Arthur Conan Doyle on *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), do not even warrant an entry in Kemp, Mitchell, and Trotter's comprehensive *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion* (1997); their works considered here, a science fiction novel and a collection of detective stories respectively, are 'popular' in genre terms and yet did not reach a second edition, while first editions are sufficiently rare to attract high prices on bibliophile internet sites. By comparison, Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men* (1905) was one of the notable, long-term commercial successes examined here, having been published in countless editions and spawning several sequels. Wallace was a literary profiteer *par excellence*, combining his knowledge of new journalistic techniques in both writing and marketing with an indefatigable rate of output: his long list of bestsellers led him to be claimed in 1928 as the author of a quarter of all books sold in that year excluding the Bible (Glover 1995: x). However, *The Four Just Men* was a self-published novel which, despite Wallace's innovative marketing campaign designed to create maximum commercial success, was a financial disaster for its author who had to petition his erstwhile employer, the newspaper magnate Alfred Harmsworth, for funds to avoid bankruptcy. By contrast, as Mary Hammond has shown, one book sold a million copies in London on its day of publication in 1881; that the book was the Revised Version of the New Testament published by Oxford University Press illustrates the point that 'popular' and what we may term 'populist' can signify very different kinds of texts. The distinction between 'popular' and 'populist' therefore might appear to be useful, with the former denoting commercial success or relatively high levels of consumption, and the latter conformity to genre categories like the detective story or science fiction. This does not, however, solve the problem of measurement. In Conrad's case, the statistics suggest, for example, that *Chance* was a more popular novel than the one that preceded it, *Under Western Eyes*. The latter did not warrant a

second issue, suggesting that the first issue of 3,000 copies did not sell out, and it was serialised in the low-circulation *English Review*. *Chance* sold 13,000 copies in seven editions in two years in Britain; in America it was serialized in the country's most commercially successful newspaper, *The New York Herald*, and syndicated to a further five North American newspapers in the same year. However, it is a critical commonplace that *Chance* was an unlikely bestseller, and that its narrative complexity does not make for an easy read.[11] Are sales and newspaper circulation figures reliable guides to what was 'popular'? Given that, until the Second World War, most fiction in Britain was consumed via libraries and magazines (Wilson 2011: 39), how can we know how many people at the time actually read Conrad's work?

It is also worth noting that *Chance*'s commercial success was relative to Conrad's other fiction; sales of 13,000 were trivial in comparison to a genuine bestseller such as George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), which "may perhaps be claimed as the first international blockbuster", selling 200,000 copies in the US and earning $1 million in sales and box-office receipts from a dramatization by the end of 1895 (Seville 2011: 29), while Hall Caine's *The Eternal City* (1901) sold over a million copies (McAleer 1992: 32). Furthermore, popularity may be the result of the spontaneous reaction of readers to a text's publication, but the evidence suggests that sales and circulation are determined by many factors beside the textual content. Indeed, Conrad's Christmas 1898 letter makes this point. This is why an analysis of the literary field such as that carried out by McDonald can be so useful, reminding us that a work 'by' Joseph Conrad is also a collaboration with other agents in the field. Facts, such as sales figures, newspaper or magazine circulation statistics, and an

[11] For the popularity of *Chance*, see pp. 301-02 below. 'Best-seller' was, as Keating reminds us, a contemporary term: it was coined in a newspaper in Kansas in 1889, but it was not until Harry Thurston Peck, editor of the New York *Bookman*, began in 1897 to publish lists of "books in demand" in an annual survey called 'Best Selling Books' that the term gained widespread currency (Keating 1989: 493).

author's earnings, may of course provide a guide to how works were received and how they were positioned in the literary field by authors, agents, publishers, and editors; they are, however, only a guide. It is partly for this reason that I have tended to rely on internal, textual evidence to determine Conrad's position on the purist-profiteer axis, and to seek to interpret it, with respect to popularity, in the light of other contemporary texts, rather than adopt an approach founded in Field Theory or book history.

'Genre fiction' might, therefore, be a more helpful term than 'popular', and questions of genre are indeed fundamental: much of what follows concerns Conrad's creative response to two genres, one of which, detective fiction, was becoming dominant by the time he entered the literary field, while another, espionage fiction, was emerging. Although, as Keating states, "[t]he relentless fragmentation and categorisation of fiction that typifies the last two decades of the nineteenth century resists any simple explanation" (Keating 1989: 340), the emergence of these and other new genres was an obvious consequence of the expanding literary market-place in the period: new readers demanded new kinds of reading, and the expansion of the publishing industry brought about a commodification of literature into recognisable types. However, the dynamic nature of publishing, readerships, and how they came together in the period, makes genre typology no easy task: detective fiction did not reach its settled, conventional form – typified by the work of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers – until after the First World War, while espionage fiction remained, for most of Conrad's career, a variable mixture of elements from earlier sub-genres such as adventure stories, 'invasion-scare' fiction, and 'dynamite novels'. Furthermore, numerous novels and stories moved, sometimes anarchically, between genres. J.S. Fletcher's *The Three Days' Terror* (1901), for example, combines tropes from science fiction and what I.F. Clarke calls "future war fiction" (Clarke 1995: 16-17) with others from detective and espionage fiction: the destruction of Charing Cross

by a group known as 'the Dictators' using a weapon that resembles the Heat-Ray in Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) is investigated by the police's counter-anarchist specialist. The uneasy mixture of science fiction, satire, and political *roman-à-clef* that characterises Conrad and Hueffer's *The Inheritors* (1901) appears less bizarre when read alongside such examples of generically unstable fiction.[12]

The difficulty of relying on stable genre categorisation in surveying the period's popular fiction therefore requires an organizational principle that can utilize but is not dependent on genre definition. Each chapter, therefore, is concerned with a particular 'character type' that can be found in 'urban' popular fiction in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods and which also appears in Conrad's work. My purpose is not so much to identify specific instances of allusion to or inspiration from populist fiction in Conrad's work – although there are instances where I argue that Conrad's reading of popular fiction *has* inflected his text, sometimes in quite striking and specific ways – but rather to take a more broadly intertextual approach to examine generic similarities and differences. In doing so I am as interested in what a putative contemporary reader, familiar with popular fiction, would have expected, or read into Conrad's fiction, as I am in what Conrad himself may have drawn from his reading and re-presented in his writing. Therefore, my method is to reconstruct what Conrad or one of his readers would have understood by the labels attached to the character types I have selected: the detective, the informer, the spymaster, the anarchist, and the swindler. I have asked myself what a contemporary reader would have expected, for example, of a novel with a title of *The Secret Agent*, how such a novel may have satisfied or disappointed such expectations, and what this might reveal about the effect that such a novel might have had on such a reader.

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[12] Susan Jones (2002) has illuminated the generic instability of *The Inheritors* by reading it against *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886), a fantasy by Marie Correlli.

Anarchists, for example – the subject of Chapter 4 – are particularly given to appearing in a wide range of genres, from attempts at social realism, such as H. Barton Baker's *Robert Miner, Anarchist* (1902), to science fiction such as E. Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist* (1893), via espionage fiction such as William Le Queux's *The Czar's Spy* (1905). It is, then, questionable whether an Edwardian reader buying or borrowing a novel that featured anarchists would have assumed that it belonged to a particular genre. Chapter 4, therefore, includes texts in a range of genres, acknowledging that labelling them as such is itself an act of interpretation. In genre terms, swindlers, the subject of my Chapter 5, are even more uncertain: Trotter's designation of a sub-genre of the "Edwardian novel of finance" (1993: 52-53) is rather subverted by the generic variety in his list of such novels, embracing E. Phillips Oppenheim's adventure story *A Millionaire of Yesterday* (1900), Arnold Bennett's light-hearted serial *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902), and Conrad's complex and experimental novel, *Chance*. As a result of these problems of definition and categorization, I have used 'populist genres' and 'genre fiction' to describe genres and the works that seem to me to fit securely within them, and 'popular fiction' as a broader term to describe texts that appear to be oriented towards a commercial market, irrespective of whether they were successful in securing a wide readership.

John Conrad's recollection of the *Boy's Own Paper* Christmas annual suggests that he too was influenced by the period's popular genres, as he demonstrates in his deduction from the presence of tobacco ash that his father was a secret reader of the annual. The anecdote also reminds us that the most prominent character in the period's dominant genre of detective fiction was an expert in drawing similar deductions. As Sherlock Holmes explains to Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887): "I have made a special study of cigar ashes – in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject. I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand either of

cigar or of tobacco" (Conan Doyle 1980: 49). Holmes and his scientific, deductive methods had delighted hundreds of thousands of late Victorian and Edwardian readers, although one potential reader claimed to remain unimpressed: in his May 1902 letter to Blackwood, after the enormous success of Holmes's revival in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Conrad wearily denounced the present age to his erstwhile publisher William Blackwood as "a time when Sherlock Holmes looms so big" (*CL*2 418). Conrad's letter, implying that Conan Doyle is an example of a "gifted loafer intent on living on credulous publishers", reads as a classic purist manifesto, disavowing to the publisher of *Lord Jim* and *Youth* the rewards due to the commercial writer – exemplified, we infer, by Conan Doyle – while staking a position for himself alongside other "modern" artists such as Wagner, Rodin, and Whistler, all of whom, Conrad says, "had to suffer for being 'new'". Was Conrad's position intended to influence Blackwood – a publisher who had already been persuaded by Meldrum to take on Conrad despite the lack of commercial promise in his writing – and therefore disingenuous? Or was Conrad sincere in this, and in his famous pronouncement in the same letter that he created *Youth* "[o]ut of the material of a boys' story […] by the force of the idea expressed in accordance with a strict conception of my method"? (*CL*2 417). Four years later, Conrad was at work on a novel that, as I shall argue, features two detectives and bears significant traces of the influence of detective fiction in general and the Sherlock Holmes saga in particular. Detectives in *The Secret Agent* provides my first case-study for locating Conrad's position, intended and actual, in the literary field, and examining his treatment of genre, whether as the raw material for modernist experimentation, or a strategy for greater commercial success by using genre and topical content.

Chapter 1

"Armed with the defensive mandate of a menaced society": Detectives

Introduction

The Secret Agent (1907) does not declare itself to be a detective story, although it features two detectives. Chief Inspector Heat is a professional detective, who has worked his way up the Scotland Yard hierarchy to become head of its Special Crimes Directorate. His superior, known only as the Assistant Commissioner, has been directly appointed to his post, having been a colonial administrator, and, as I intend to show, he performs an equivalent function to the amateur detective heroes of the genre. By including detectives in his novel, knowingly or otherwise Conrad was entering a highly competitive – and, potentially, highly lucrative – marketplace. One commentator claimed in 1897 that stories concerning crime and criminals comprised eighty per cent of new fiction (McDonald 1997: 160), and *The Secret Agent* was published in a market in which the prominence of detective fiction showed no signs of abating. 1907 saw R. Austin Freeman's novel *The Red Thumb Mark,* which introduced the forensic scientist-detective Dr. Thorndyke, A.C. Fox-Davies's novel *The Mauleverer Murders,* and the American Jacques Futrelle's collection of stories about the scientist-detective Professor S.F.X. Van Dusen, *The Thinking Machine*. 1906 – the year of the novel's composition and its serialization in the United States – saw Godfrey R. Benson's novel *Tracks in the Snow* and Robert Barr's collection *The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont*, and in 1905 B. Fletcher Robinson's *The Chronicles of Addington Peace* was published, as well as volumes by two major writers: Arnold Bennett's

comic crime stories, *The Loot of Cities*, and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.[1]

The uneasy relationship between Holmes, Conan Doyle, and the *Strand Magazine*'s publisher George Newnes illustrates the enormous commercial value placed on detective fiction in the period. As is well known, Conan Doyle intended Holmes to die in the grip of Moriarty in the Swiss Alps at the end of 'The Final Problem' in 1893, having had "such an overdose of him that I feel towards him as I do towards *paté de fois gras*, of which I once ate too much" (Symons 1974: 79). Holmes, however, had "played a major part in the unprecedented commercial and cultural achievements of the *Strand*" (McDonald 1997: 157), so Newnes persisted in his attempts to persuade Conan Doyle to revive Holmes until the latter relented in 1901, when *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a story which supposedly pre-dated Holmes's death, began to be serialized in the *Strand*. After another two years Conan Doyle finally accepted the offer for new Holmes stories of $5,000 from the American *Collier's* and £100 per thousand words from the *Strand* (Symons 1974: 79). Holmes returned to Baker Street where he remained for another two decades. A comparison with Conrad's earnings at the time illustrates the commercial value of the Holmes property: in 1902, Conrad earned £200 for *Typhoon*, 'Amy Foster' and 'Falk' (Stape 2007: 125). At 73,300 words for the three works combined, Conrad could therefore expect less than £2.15.0 per thousand words – putting his words, on this evidence, at less than one-thirty-fifth of the market value of Conan Doyle's. And while Conan Doyle and Newnes responded to public demand, they did not satisfy it. The numerous imitations-with-variations of Holmes, commissioned from literary writers such as Arthur Morrison, and G.K. Chesterton, as well as populists such as The Baroness

[1] For bibliographic information on fictional texts mentioned in the thesis, see the chronology at Annex A.

(Emma) Orczy, suggest that Holmes stimulated yet more demand. The result was that detective fiction, serialized or in short story form, became the dominant popular genre of the period.

It did so from origins that remain a subject of debate, with some of its historians insisting that "there could be no detective stories until organized police and detective forces existed", and others who "find examples of rational deduction in sources as various as the Bible and Voltaire" (Symons 1974: 23). Symons provides a useful summary of the genre's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century origins in Britain, France, and America. He suggests that the "characteristic note of crime literature is first struck in *Caleb Williams*" (William Godwin, 1794), whose eponymous hero becomes an amateur detective when he begins to suspect that his employer, Falkland, possesses a guilty secret. Symons describes the influence on writers of crime fiction of Eugène François Vidocq's *Mémoires* (1828-9), purportedly the true story of a thief who went on to help found the *brigade de sûretė*, as "immense" (1974: 29), inspiring the creation by Vidocq's friend Honoré de Balzac of Vautrin/Jacques Collin, criminal-turned-police officer, and, later, the works of Émile Gaboriau, who created the detective Lecoq in the 1860s.[2] Symons identifies Edgar Allan Poe as "the founding father whose genius suggested the themes to be followed by other writers": Poe called his stories featuring C. Auguste Dupin (1841-44) "tales of ratiocination" in which the amateur Dupin uses his superior logical and observational powers to solve extraordinary crimes whose real explanation eludes the professional police officers (1974: 35-42).

[2] Vautrin/Collin features in *Le Père Goriot* (1834-5), *Illusions perdues* (1837-43) and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838-44). Conrad was familiar with Balzac's novels and alludes to *Le Père Goriot* in 'An Outpost of Progress' (1896).

What caused the genre to gain so much literary ground during the second half of the nineteenth century was, according to another of its historians, "the development of the modern police force and the creation of the modern bureaucratic state" in societies such as Britain "that were increasingly preoccupied with systematically bringing under control the potentially anarchic forces unleashed by democratic reform, urban growth, national expansion, and imperial engagement" (Thomas 1999: 4-5). John Carey sees the detective as having an even broader function of reassurance, identifying Sherlock Holmes as "a comforting version of the intellectual for mass consumption" who disperses "the fears of overwhelming anonymity that the urban mass brought": in identifying the individual peculiarities of his apparently nondescript clients, "Holmes's redemptive genius as a detective lies in rescuing individuals from the mass" (1992: 8). Detective fiction therefore reflected not only the new institutions – the *brigade de sûretė* (1812), the Metropolitan Police's Detective Department (1842), Pinkerton's National Detective Agency in the US (1850) – but also responded to the fundamental political, demographic, social, and industrial changes which bought those institutions into being. The rise of detective fiction can therefore be seen, in part, as an expression of the demand for reassurance from a detective force equipped to counter these potentially anarchic forces.

Evidence for this can be found in the close relationship between the nineteenth century's real and fictional detectives, and the positive presentation of the detective in fiction, some journalism, and memoir. This relationship is exemplified by Dickens's interest in detection: his research for admiring articles in *Household Words* in 1850-1 about detectives, notably Charles Frederick Field, also inspired Field's fictional analogue, Inspector Bucket, in *Bleak House* (1852-3). Wilkie Collins continued the tradition of transforming real detectives into fictional ones with Sergeant Cuff in *The*

Moonstone (1868), partly based on Jonathan Whicher, the detective publicly censured for correctly identifying Constance Kent as the culprit in the notorious Road Murder (Summerscale 2008: 267-70) – a connection with which Conrad may have been familiar.[3] Journalistic and literary interest in detectives meant that Field, Whicher and their colleagues and successors were public figures as well as professional detectives, becoming fictional characters, as well as writing, or being written about, as themselves. Following his retirement, former Chief Inspector J.G. Littlechild published his memoirs in 1894 and his public profile increased after his retirement when he was employed by the Marquess of Queensbury to gather evidence against Oscar Wilde in 1895 (Porter 1987: 119). Former Chief Inspector William Melville, identified by Norman Sherry (1971: 302-13) as the prototype of Conrad's Chief Inspector Heat, was admiringly described by the public official and journalist Arthur Griffiths as "our chief mainstay and defence" against Fenianism (Griffiths 1898: 131-2), was profiled in the *Daily Graphic* and *Westminster Budget* in 1894 (Sherry 1971: 303), and his departure from the Metropolitan Police in 1903 was commemorated in *The Times* (10 November 1903: 9) with an article describing him as "the most celebrated detective of the day".

In writing their memoirs, detectives "understood the necessity of catering to public taste and tailored the material in their books for commercial consumption" (Shpayer-Makov 2006: 104) and used literary techniques to present themselves to their public. The former detective Andrew Lansdowne, for example, while pleading that he was not inventing "stories", nonetheless admitted to literary artifice: "I have not scrupled even to employ a little of the ideal, which […] is indispensable to the real in fiction – and I presume also to any form of literature which is intended for public

[3] Conrad's 'The Lagoon' was published in *Cornhill Magazine* (no 445, January 1897, pp. 59-71). He would have only had to turn over a few pages from his own story to come to an account of the Road Murder by J.B. Atlay, which concludes with an assessment that Cuff was based on real detectives: "it is, I think, impossible to doubt that he [Collins] had Whicher and Foley in his mind" (Atlay 1897: 94).

entertainment" (Lansdowne 1890: 4-5). Lansdowne has a fictional counterpart in Inspector Grodman in Israel Zangwill's *The Big Bow Mystery* (1892) whose 'Criminals I Have Caught' becomes a bestseller; its ghost-writer, a poet, attributes its success to the fact that he "idealised the bare facts and lifted them into the realm of poetry and literature" (Zangwill 1892: 64).

The techniques of detective memoir and detective fiction became, therefore, increasingly blurred. Both responded to criticism by journalists and politicians of supposed weaknesses in police competence in countering potentially anarchic forces. This criticism sometimes drew attention to a gap between the efficiency of fictional detectives and the incompetence of real ones: *The Times* in 1870, for example, archly commented that the British public was "consoling itself for the impunity of the robber of real life by the speed and certainty with which the detective of fiction tracks out his imaginary criminals" (qtd. Emsley and Shpayer-Makov 2006: 1). That the police detective had a reputation that needed defending had been evident from the 1860s, when the Metropolitan Police's response to Fenian terrorism in Britain prompted *Punch* to coin the mocking soubriquet "Defective Department". A crisis then came in the 1870s with revelations of serious corruption in the Detective Department, prompting journalistic outrage as well as criminal trials of detectives, official inquiries, and substantial reform and reorganization at Scotland Yard, including the creation of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and the writing, by the CID's new head, Howard Vincent, of the *Police Code* (1881) (Morris 2006: 83). The Whitechapel Murders of 1888 further compromised the metropolitan detective's reputation. W.T. Stead, probably the period's most influential journalist, campaigned in the *Pall Mall Gazette* against the CID's ineffectiveness from 1886 to 1888 and, following the Whitechapel Murders, wrote: "London is the greatest city in the world. Yet her

detectives are at fault, utterly and apparently, hopelessly, at fault." Stead suggested that poor leadership had left the CID "decapitated", and singled out for condemnation a man whose memoirs would later inspire *The Secret Agent*. Robert Anderson was, in Stead's words, "a millenarian and writer of religious books [...] but although Dr. Anderson is nominally at the head of the CID he is only there in spirit" (Stead 1888).

Scandals and public criticism presumably shaped a change in how detectives were presented in fiction. For example, Zangwill's lionized, retired detective George Grodman is the author not only of a memoir, but also of the murder of Arthur Constant, motivated by Grodman's intellectually vain desire to show how an undetectable crime could be committed. Grodman's successor at Scotland Yard, Inspector Wimp, "was at his greatest in collecting circumstantial evidence; in putting two and two together to make five" (Zangwill 1892: 71). Unsurprisingly, Wimp fails to solve the crime, and Grodman, having confessed his guilt to the Home Secretary in order to save an innocent man from execution, kills himself. Such fictional presentations, as well as journalistic criticism, pushed real detectives increasingly to defend themselves in print: "Running through all the memoirs is an underlying assumption that the distorted image of police detectives was the product of the way they were depicted in fiction" (Shpayer-Makov 2006: 119).

The late-Victorian reader, therefore, may have been subjected to two contrasting perspectives on detection and crime: one, exemplified by detective memoir, showed ordinary, hard-working professionals attempting, usually successfully, to contain the anarchic forces that modernity had brought into being; another, exemplified by Stead's campaigning journalism, showed those anarchic forces to be close to overwhelming the inefficient, and badly-led, official organizations set up to contain them. These contrasting perspectives shaped the development of the

detective genre from the late 1880s and are discernible in *The Secret Agent*, which bears traces of detective memoir and fiction in its portraits of Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner. As well as exploiting the tropes of detective fiction for aesthetic effect, *The Secret Agent* engages with many of the same questions that had preoccupied detective fiction and memoirs in the previous twenty years. These include the immediate, practical questions raised by crime and policing: what techniques should the police use to prevent or detect crime? Which are effective, and which appropriate? These questions also implied other, more fundamental, social ones: where should the balance be struck between individual liberty and surveillance by the state? How should society respond to technological change? How should society absorb the effects of increased specialization in the workplace?

The debate in journalism, memoir, and fiction about police competence was a particularly clear reflection of this last question. From its foundation in the 1840s, Britain's detective force became increasingly professionalized, reflecting wider changes in Victorian society that saw the emergence of new professions and a growing professional middle class (Perkin 1989: 79-94). Fiction also saw greater professionalization, with the emergence in 1884 for example of a professional body, the Society of Authors, and ancillary professions such as that of literary agent. There is some irony that the emerging cadre of professional writers included some, like Conan Doyle, Arthur Morrison, and Conrad, who used detective fiction to question not only the competence of professionals in the world of policing, but also the very position of the professional in modern British society.

Gentlemen and Players

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes differs from Dickens's and Collins's detectives, and resembles Poe's Auguste Dupin, in being an amateur. Like Dupin, Holmes is cerebral, logical, scientific, and in this he is insistently contrasted with the professional detectives from Scotland Yard who are usually none of those things.[4] In the first two Sherlock Holmes novels, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890), Conan Doyle's professionals are consistently obtuse, unimaginative, and self-serving. Gregson, in the first novel, is "the smartest of the Scotland Yarders", and he and Lestrade "are the pick of the bad lot" (Conan Doyle 1980: 36). Nevertheless, they fail to preserve evidence, or even see any clue, at the scene of Enoch J. Drebber's murder in Brixton (42). The contrast between the amateur and the professionals is illustrated by Holmes's discovery of a wedding ring at the scene: Gregson says that this "complicates matters," but Holmes responds: "You're sure it doesn't simplify them?" (42). Holmes, we infer, has already developed a hypothesis that the new evidence confirms. Despite their failings, Gregson and Lestrade, as Holmes correctly predicts, take the credit for the investigation's successful outcome. Significantly, Holmes accepts not being awarded any credit as a consequence "of being an unofficial personage" (37): credit naturally devolves on the professional caste, whether deserved or not, while the amateur modestly continues to operate, unrecognized, behind the scenes. Although Conan Doyle's presentation of police detectives softened in the *Strand* stories, with Holmes often praising the bravery and insight of more competent, helpful, and appropriately humble professionals, such as Inspector Martin in 'The

[4] Holmes's antipathy towards the professional detective was sufficiently prominent to feature as one of the first jokes in Robert Barr's parody, 'The Adventures of Sherlaw Kombs', published in *The Idler* in 1892: "So great was Sherlaw Kombs's contempt for Scotland Yard that he never would visit Scotland during his vacations, nor would ever admit that a Scotchman was fit for anything but export" (Barr 1997: 204).

Dancing Men' (1903), Lestrade in particular remained wedded to the obvious solution. In the Sherlock Holmes saga, Morrison's Martin Hewitt saga, and other stories by Conan Doyle's many imitators, the detective's reassuring function is identified with the amateur and not the professional. Indeed, without the benefit of the amateur's intervention, the limited competence of professionals such as Lestrade, or Inspector Nettings in Morrison's 'The Affair of the Tortoise' (1894) would have led to a miscarriage of justice, with the wrong man in both stories presumably facing execution for a crime he did not commit. Such professionals are consistently unable to read correctly the evidence in front of them. In Morrison's story, for example, the apparent murder of the Caribbean 'victim', Rameau, is explained by a note written in French found at the scene: "*puni par un venger de la tortue*" (Morrison 1894: 295). The circumstantial evidence – that the victim had killed a tortoise which had been adopted as a pet by his neighbour, Goujon, following an argument – leads Nettings to assume that "tortue" signifies tortoise and that Goujon, being French, must have written the note. Convinced by the obvious, Nettings does not even bother to collect a sample of Goujon's handwriting, despite Martin Hewitt's prompt that he should do so and consider other hypotheses (299). When Hewitt reveals the truth – that "la tortue" signifies a Caribbean island where Rameau had been associated with the brutal suppression of political unrest by the authorities, and that Rameau has in fact survived the attack on him and fled the scene – Nettings blames the writer of the note for misleading him: "I wish he hadn't been such an ignorant nigger. If he'd only have put the capitals to the words 'La Tortue', I might have thought a little more about them, instead of taking it for granted that they meant that wretched tortoise" (310). Similarly, when Gregson and Lestrade in *A Study in Scarlet* are confronted with the word "Rache" written in blood at the murder scene, they assume that it signifies a woman

named Rachel. Holmes supplies the necessary direction to re-read the sign as a German word meaning ‘revenge’. These professional detectives cannot read correctly the messages left for them at the scenes of crimes.

This negative portrayal of professional detectives clearly owes something to class prejudice. As one historian of real and fictional detectives puts it:

> All the evidence shows that the majority of police officers […] originated from the working class, with a minority from the lower middle class. The sustained belittlement of the police detective in literature may have had its roots in bourgeois anxiety regarding the threat lurking from below to their own powerful, yet relatively newly created position in society. (Shpayer-Makov 2011: 257-58)

Significantly, one of the few really competent Scotland Yard detectives in Edwardian fiction was an aristocrat, created by a writer whose aristocratic background was central to her literary identity and who, prior to writing detective fiction, had in 1903 achieved a huge popular success with Sir Percy Blakeney, ‘The Scarlet Pimpernel’, rescuer of fellow aristocrats from villainous revolutionaries. The eponymous detective of Baroness Orczy’s *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910) is, despite her place of work, really an amateur, who is called on by her superiors at Scotland Yard when the male, professional, lower-class detectives have failed to solve a case. As her confidante and former maid, Mary Granard, observes, Lady Molly “managed to keep her position in Society […] whilst exercising a profession which usually does not make for high social standing” (Orczy 1910: 292). Her amateur status is confirmed when Granard reveals that Lady Molly entered police service immediately after her husband Hubert de Mazereen’s conviction for murder.

> From that small post she has worked her way upwards, analysing and studying, exercising her powers of intuition and deduction, until at the present moment she is considered, by chiefs and men alike, the greatest authority among them on criminal investigation. […] The task of her life is to apply her gifts, and the obvious advantages at her disposal as a prominent member of the detective force, to prove the innocence of Captain Hubert de Mazareen, which she never doubted for a moment. (Orczy 1910: 309)

Lady Molly, therefore, fulfils the amateur's function of using her superior talents – in her case, as the stories repeatedly demonstrate, founded on female intuition – to save the innocent from the errors of professional detectives.

Just as the best detectives were usually privileged amateurs, so were the best criminals. Raffles, created by Conan Doyle's brother-in-law E.W. Hornung, was a criminal alter-ego of Sherlock Holmes who first appeared in *Cassell's Magazine* in 1898. The stories collected in *The Amateur Cracksman* (1899) emphasize the rivalry between professional thieves and gentleman-amateurs, a dichotomy signalled particularly strongly in 'Gentlemen and Players', in which Raffles uses his cricketing prowess to gain access to the rich pickings of a country house. Raffles's love of the game that, by the late Victorian period, had become a national institution is not accidental. As the story's title reminds us, the game of cricket was played according to a "class-based apartheid" that divided its participants into 'gentlemen', who received expenses, and 'players', who received wages (Kynaston 2010: 28-29). Detectives, criminals, and cricketers were all subject to the nineteenth century's accelerating division of labour that was manifest in class as well as function. According to Dennis Porter (1981: 181-82), this provides a clue to the ideological assumptions of detective fiction: "In reality, the police detective is a typical example of the division of labor in modern society, a trained specialist within the police department itself. Yet the literary

detective of the classic detective novel is always represented as something more than a narrow specialist because he treats the work of detection itself as a hobby. That is why his amateur status is of such ideological significance". The successful amateur like Holmes or Raffles is a gentleman of leisure; his professional rivals, representing the working class, are less insightful, less knowledgeable, and less successful. These assumptions reflected some of the prevailing attitudes: real policemen in the nineteenth century were recruited from the working classes, and there was a strong element of class prejudice, for example, in the public criticism of Whicher's handling of the Road case (Summerscale 2008: 45, 175).

Porter's analysis is rather simplistic, however: detective fiction's treatment of class is more varied, and more complex, than he suggests. The class distance between, for example, Lady Molly and Martin Hewitt is enormous, the latter having started his detective career as a clerk in a firm of solicitors where he made a name for himself collecting evidence for the plaintiff in the case of a contested will (Morrison 1894: 4). Furthermore, much detective fiction – written, after all, for newly literate readers with jobs as well as leisure-time – is notably sympathetic towards its lower-middle-class characters. Conan Doyle's Hall Pycroft in 'The Stockbroker's Clerk' (1893) and Morrison's Charles William Laker in 'The Case of Laker, Absconded' (1895) are both clerks suspected – partly as a result of their lower social class – of involvement in financial crime, revealed by the (amateur) detective to be not only innocent but also victims of the real criminals. Professional detectives, therefore, appear exempt from the class sympathy that writers like Conan Doyle and Morrison more usually display. This suggests either that it is the process of professionalization itself that is of concern, or that detecting crime is sufficiently important to require something different from other areas of endeavour. Both may be true. The period's detective fiction frequently

implies anxiety about miscarried justice, suggesting that detection is too important to society and individual freedom to be left to a cadre of blue-collar workers promoted out of uniform by an inefficient bureaucracy like the Metropolitan Police. In Shpayer-Makov's analysis (2011: 261): "It is the private detective who symbolizes the virtues of individualism and is the natural carrier of bourgeois ideology […]. The emphasis is on detective activity that stems from freedom of action and private enterprise; from individual action based on an innate drive rather than external pressures emanating from bureaucratic regulations". Exceptional talent must be brought to bear, such as a capacity for observing as well as seeing, to use Holmes's frequent formula, or the intuition of Lady Molly, as well as skills acquired and honed by practice and study.

The detectives themselves, however, frequently demystify the process of detection. Martin Hewitt describes his "powers" as "nothing but common sense assiduously applied and made quick by habit" (Morrison 1895: 19). R. Austin Freeman's Dr Thorndyke, who in *The Red Thumb-Mark* saves the innocent suspect Reuben Hornby from disgrace by exposing fingerprint evidence as fake, emphasizes the necessity of practice and effort: "The observant man is, in reality, the attentive man, and the so-called power of observation is simply the capacity for continuous attention" (Freeman 2001: 127). Dr Thorndyke, like several other amateur detectives, is actually a professional-specialist from a different discipline – in his case, medical science – applying his skills and knowledge in a criminal-legal context, not unlike Holmes who, when we first meet him, is a chemistry student. The period's detective fiction, therefore, does not so much dismiss professionalism as insist upon it – as long as it is grounded in technical knowledge and training as well as talent. In Shpayer-Makov's words, "most of the fictional police detectives were not sufficiently skilled to root out crime themselves and needed vocational advice" (2011: 264): the problem

with the fictional Scotland Yarders is that too often they are professionals in name only.

Do Conrad's detectives correspond to this paradigm of the conventional, procedure-driven professional, and the talented, observant, and practised amateur? Chief Inspector Heat is, like Inspectors Lestrade and Nettings, a working-class, professional detective. His class affiliations can be inferred from his reading "popular publications" (*SA* 71), his sympathy with "thieving" as "an industry exercised in an industrious world" (74), and his identification with "the quality of the work he is obliged to do" – whereas others draw their sense of identity from their "social position" or "the superiority of the idleness" that they "may be fortunate enough to enjoy" (92). He thinks of himself as "a trusted servant" (97). He is conscious of the privileges and burdens of his professional caste, and amongst his burdens is his immediate superior, the Assistant Commissioner: "He was strong in his integrity of a good detective […]. On the other hand, he admitted to himself that it was difficult to preserve one's reputation if rank outsiders were going to take a hand in the business" (70). Crucially, Heat thinks of the Assistant Commissioner as a non-professional outsider: "Outsiders are the bane of the police as of other professions" (70).

Heat's relationship with the Assistant Commissioner reveals the latter's function as the talented amateur detective who is scorned by, but intellectually and socially superior to, his professional rival. The Assistant Commissioner's class allegiance is shown by the "influential connections" of his wife (an "excellent match") (80), and his gentleman-amateur status is confirmed by his leisure pursuit of whist at a London club. He thinks of Heat in terms of "[o]ld and valued servants" (113) whereas he himself is a "born detective" (92). Like his two predecessors, we infer, the Assistant Commissioner's appointment was political, in contrast to the professional Heat's rise

from the ranks. The Assistant Commissioner's route into policing began in colonial administration, in which the narrator emphasizes the Assistant Commissioner's combination of game-playing amateurism and administrative talent: "The police work he had been engaged on in a distant part of the globe had the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of open-air sport. His real abilities, which were mainly of an administrative order, were combined with an adventurous disposition" (89).

The rivalry between Heat and the Assistant Commissioner over the appropriate response to the Greenwich bombing is explored extensively in Chapters V, VI, VII, and IX of the novel. Both parties in this contest correspond to detective fiction-type: the professional exemplifies adherence to procedure, a limited insight into the significance of the evidence, and a propensity to take the shortest route to securing a conviction, while the amateur intervenes to solve the case by applying his superior talents, and thereby saving an innocent man from wrongful punishment. The potential victim of Heat's investigation is Michaelis, the former convict who has been released on probation. The Assistant Commissioner has his own, domestic motives for ensuring Michaelis remains at liberty – retaining the good opinion of his wife, whose circle includes Michaelis's aristocratic protector, the Lady Patroness – so he cannot be said to be entirely disinterested in the affair. Conversely, Heat's motives are not entirely self-serving: his identification of Michaelis as the culprit is designed to preserve his department's "system of supervision" and to neutralize what Heat perceives to be a longstanding social threat (159). However, while the novel problematizes and, to an extent, balances the moral rights and wrongs of the two men's positions, it undeniably engages the anxiety that runs through the period's detective fiction about the vulnerability of the innocent to the wrongful attribution of guilt, and, like its populist

antecedents, attributes that vulnerability to the methods of the professional detective. As the Assistant Commissioner puts it to Sir Ethelred, Heat's professional "duty" is "to fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists as he can on some slight indications he has picked up in the course of his investigation on the spot" (110). By contrast, the Assistant Commissioner's objective of identifying the true culprit would be seen by Heat as "vindicating" the anarchists' "innocence" (110).

The historical as well as fictional models for the Assistant Commissioner and Heat appear to conform to the professional and amateur paradigm. In the 'Author's Note' appended to *The Secret Agent* in 1920, Conrad indicated that the novel was partly inspired by "the rather summary recollections of an Assistant Commissioner of Police […] (I believe his name was Anderson)" (6).[5] Robert Anderson's *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement* (1906) reveals its author to have been brought into Scotland Yard's leadership not, like Conrad's Assistant Commissioner, from a tropical colony, but from the Home Office, where he had been responsible for Britain's intelligence efforts against Fenians in North America. Nevertheless, Anderson can hardly be said to have been a trained detective – like Conrad's Assistant Commissioner, his background was in counter-insurgency rather than mainstream policing (R. Anderson 1906; Sherry 1971: 290-99). As we have seen, Heat was drawn from William Melville, a founding member and later head of the Special Irish Branch, formed in 1883 to combat Fenian terrorism in Britain – the organisation upon which Conrad presumably modelled his "Special Crimes division" (Sherry 1971: 302-5). His connection to Conrad's

[5] Despite Conrad's description of it as "a book which as far as I know had never attained any prominence" (40), *Sidelights* was published in two editions (1906 and a "new and cheaper edition with a new introduction in answer to his critics" in 1907) by John Murray, another by Hodder and Stoughton in 1908, and an abridged version entitled *A Great Conspiracy* by John Murray in 1910. Conrad's suggestion that the book precipitated *The Secret Agent*'s narrative is also misleading, as he had already drafted the first three chapters at least when Anderson's book was published on 12 May 1906. The timeline suggests that, as with *Under Western Eyes* later, Conrad improvised the novel's plot as he wrote, taking the narrative in new directions according to inspiration supplied by his reading.

acknowledged source material is direct: he led the raid on the anarchist Autonomie Club in the wake of the 'Greenwich Bomb Outrage' which had been carried out by Martial Bourdin, one of the Club's members (Sherry 1971: 304).[6]

However, Anderson's memoirs show that the correspondence between the real and the fictional Assistant Commissioner is not quite as neat as might first appear and, as this and the following chapter will show, Conrad drew from Anderson's book important material for his presentation of Heat. *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement* is as much a detective memoir as it is the reflection on Irish politics declared by its title, and like his former colleagues, Littlechild and Lansdowne, Anderson sought to set the record straight. As well as defending his own conduct over the Parnell Inquiry (see p. 100 below), Anderson defended the methods of police detectives, especially when facing covertly organised adversaries such as Fenians and anarchists: "The uniformed police upon the streets can deal with ordinary law-breakers, but they are wholly incompetent to grapple with the crime plots of professional criminals. And the attempt to deal with crime of the kind here in view [i.e. Fenianism], under 'ordinary law' and by ordinary methods, is the merest trifling" (R. Anderson 1906: 127). Anderson's book is a justification of modern, professional policing – an endeavour, he suggests, that requires methods not always palatable to the British public, but necessary to manage modern, professional crime. Anderson's loyalty, like Heat's, is to a "system of supervision" that necessitated a rebalancing of the relationship between the state and the individual. Central to this system, in fiction and in fact, was the police informer – a topic examined in detail in Chapter 2. For the remainder of this chapter, I

[6] In presenting Melville as the principal source for Heat, however, Sherry overstates his case, citing as evidence works by Anderson and Melville Macnaghten (Assistant Commissioner from 1903-1913) which were published several years after *The Secret Agent.* Sherry cites Macnaghten's *Days of My Years* (Edward Arnold, London, 1914) and Anderson's *The Lighter Side of My Official Life* which was published (Hodder and Stoughton) in 1910, having first been serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* the same year.

shall examine three other aspects of this system – science and logic, disguise, and surveillance – all of which were endorsed in memoirs such as Anderson's, and which were employed by fictional detectives both amateur and professional, and in both genre fiction and *The Secret Agent*.

"His trained faculties of an excellent investigator"

Sherlock Holmes often told Dr. Watson that he solved detective puzzles by the application of particular "methods", principally the scientific method of observation and the logical process that Holmes calls "deduction". It is the rigour with which he applies his scientific and logical methods that leads Watson to describe him frequently as a machine: for example, in the first of the *Strand* stories, 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891), Watson described Holmes as "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen" (Conan Doyle 1976: 15). These methods also distinguish Holmes, the scientific amateur, from the professionals, who frequently criticize him as "theoretical". The Scotland Yard detective Peter Jones in 'The Red Headed League' (1891), for example, patronizingly compliments Holmes in these terms: "'He has his own little methods, which are, if he won't mind me saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him. It is not too much to say that once or twice […] he has been more nearly correct than the official force'" (1976: 79). Conan Doyle repeatedly contrasts Holmes's scientific and logical rigour with the common-sensical but usually flawed approach of the professionals. Even those who recognize Holmes's brilliance, and seek to emulate it, fail. Holmes's protégé in Scotland Yard, Stanley Hopkins, is described by Watson in 'Black Peter' (1904) as "an exceedingly alert man […] a young police inspector for whose future Holmes had high hopes, while he in turn professed the admiration and

respect of a pupil for the scientific methods of the famous amateur" (Conan Doyle 1964: 137). Hopkins seeks to apply the Holmes methods but fails, not only in this case but also in 'The Golden Pince-Nez' (1904) and 'The Abbey Grange' (1904). Like his less-promising colleagues such as Lestrade and Gregson, Hopkins falls victim to the obvious conclusion and his own assumptions.

Detective fiction developed alongside – at times literally so – the new disciplines of forensic science and criminology. The magazines that published Conan Doyle's, and Conrad's stories, often contained factual features about science – the *Strand*'s literary editor Herbert Greenhough Smith claimed in 1911 that "popular science and natural history articles" were more prominent in his magazine than in any other – and, after Holmes's success, the magazine began to show a particular interest in forensics and criminal psychology (McDonald 1997: 158). The extent to which criminological fact and detective fiction overlap within the pages of Victorian and Edwardian magazines is illustrated by the *Strand*'s interest in the discipline of anthropometry – cataloguing and identifying people by measuring their physical characteristics – associated with the French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon. Holmes expresses his "enthusiastic admiration" for the "French savant" and his "system of measurements" in the 'The Naval Treaty' (Conan Doyle 1970: 221), which appeared in the *Strand* in 1893. The May 1894 issue of the same magazine had Morrison's Martin Hewitt describing, with approval, Bertillon's system in 'The Case of Mr Foggatt'. Sherlock Holmes's return to the *Strand* in August 1901 with the first part of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* featured a dialogue between Holmes and Dr Mortimer in which the latter describes, to Holmes's chagrin, Bertillon as "the first expert in Europe on criminal matters" (Conan Doyle 1975a: 19). The *Strand*'s April 1904 issue contained, as well as the Holmes story 'The Adventure of Charles Augustus

Milverton' (373-383), a factual article about Bertillon and the application of anthropometry to detection, Alder Anderson's 'Detectives At School' (443-447). The influence of science is evident not only in Holmes's methods but also in the professional backgrounds of several of his imitations. Edwardian scientist-detectives include L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace's Eric Vandeleur, R. Austin Freeman's Dr Thorndyke, and E.W. Hornung's Dr John Dollar. Indeed, Freeman made a particular virtue of the forensic accuracy of his Dr Thorndyke stories, stating in the Preface to *John Thorndyke's Cases* that they have "for the most part, a medico-legal motive, and the methods of solution described in them are similar to those employed in actual practice by medical jurists. The stories illustrate, in fact, the application to the detection of crime of the ordinary methods of scientific research" (Freeman 1909: vii).

Despite this insistence by the fictional amateurs that their professional rivals' methods were unscientific, the real professionals, while making clear that detection involved more routine work and patience than breakthroughs and inspiration, were in fact capable of using observation and logic. Lansdowne, for example, deduced in one case from a boot-mark that a burglar was female (Lansdowne 1890: 84), while Inspector Moser, on the trail of Fenian "infernal machines", deduced the location of the explosive devices from careful observation of a consignment of cement on a quayside in Liverpool (Moser and Rideal 1890: 21-27). Indeed, developments in Victorian science not merely enabled but necessitated greater rigour in police methods, as science began to demonstrate the inadequacy of traditional police approaches. The rise of forensic science was in part a response to increased scepticism about the reliability of witness testimony. Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal* (1890), "the first systematic English work on criminal anthropology", emphasized the need for scientific research in response to the "extensive literature which is growing up concerning the

nature and fallacies of verbal evidence, and the influences which affect the credibility of witnesses" (Thomas 1999: 35-6).

The same scepticism about witness testimony is evident in some of the earliest detective fiction, including *The Moonstone* (1868) with its succession of witnesses, not all of whom tell the truth and all of whom see matters with a certain amount of bias, and Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), which contains a lengthy newspaper report summarizing the testimony of numerous mistaken witnesses. Holmes's clients are consistently honest, but are often mistaken, while those whom Holmes investigates frequently fail to tell the truth. As Thomas observes, "Watson's first-person narratives demonstrate over and over that history is always a narrative told by someone. Holmes's complaints, at the same time, keep warning about the deceptions inherent in such accounts" (1999: 78). In 'The Abbey Grange', for example, a wealth of witness testimony – apparently supported by the material evidence – indicates that Sir Eustace Brackenstall was murdered and his wife attacked by three professional burglars. Lady Brackenstall describes her assailants and their actions to Holmes and Stanley Hopkins, and her maid corroborates her testimony. Holmes accepts their version of events until the significance dawns upon him of the beeswing present in only one of three glasses from which, Lady Brackenstall says, the burglars drank to steel their nerves. Holmes says to Watson: "allow me to lay the evidence before you, imploring you in the first instance to dismiss from your mind the idea that anything which the maid or mistress may have said must necessarily be true" (Conan Doyle 1964: 277). Holmes carries out a second, more thorough examination of the scene of the crime and finds further evidence to disprove Lady Brackenstall's account.

Another text that turns on the fallibility of human perception, Zangwill's *The Big Bow Mystery*, culminates with the detective-murderer, Inspector Grodman, lecturing the Home Secretary on the subject:

> The science of evidence being thus so extremely subtle, and demanding the most acute and trained observation of facts, the most comprehensive understanding of human psychology, is naturally given over to professors who have not the remotest idea that "things are not what they seem" and that everything is other than it appears […]. The retailing of evidence – the observation of the facts – is given over to people who go through their lives without eyes; the appreciation of evidence – the judging of these facts – is surrendered to people who may possibly be adepts in weighing out pounds of sugar. Apart from their sheer inability to fulfil either function – to observe, or to judge – their observation and their judgment alike are vitiated by all sorts of irrelevant prejudices […]. I say nothing of lapses of memory, of inborn defects of observational power […]. The great obstacle to veracious observation is the element of prepossession in all vision. […] The mind is a large factor of every so-called external fact. The eye sees, sometimes, what it wishes to see, more often what it expects to see. (Zangwill 1892: 162-6)

As Grodman reveals, his 'perfect murder' in a locked room was achieved through a manipulation of a witness's perception, as the victim's landlady Mrs Drabdump had failed to observe that her lodger's throat was being cut by Grodman at the moment she 'discovered' the corpse. Grodman had misdirected Mrs Drabdump's attention like a stage magician, and his motive, as he explains to the Home Secretary, was simply to show how easily this could be achieved. Grodman thus argues that any faith in witness testimony is potentially misplaced, suggesting a fundamental anxiety about the reliability not only of witnesses but also of criminal justice in general.

The reliability of witnesses is a major concern of Conrad's fiction – perhaps particularly so in *Chance*, which, as Hampson has shown, contains striking allusions to

the detective genre, as in Marlow's description of the disappearance of Captain Anthony as "this affair of the purloined brother" (148), recalling Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' (1845). The novel's "succession of narrators is, in fact, a series of witnesses. […] Marlow both recounts and explores the evidence of these various witnesses to try and produce a final picture – 'a coherent theory' – as in the detective story" (Hampson 1992a: 382). Yet whereas the narrators/witnesses of *The Moonstone* and 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' appear in an orderly succession, as in a court, Marlow's task – and the reader's – is made inordinately more challenging by the complexity with which the material is presented. *Chance*'s witnesses offer either fragments, or hearsay testimony that is sometimes third- or fourth-hand – and therefore filtered through several subjective points of view before reaching the reader. Whereas Holmes asserts and then demonstrates that witness testimony is potentially unreliable, *Chance* builds scepticism into its narrative technique. For example, Flora's letter to Mrs Fyne is interpreted via a chain of witnesses – Mrs Fyne to her husband to Captain Anthony – only the first of whom has actually read it, and who (according to Flora) has failed to understand it. Even when Flora and Marlow discuss the letter, its actual content is only hinted at. Hampson compares this to Poe's reticence about the purloined letter, observing that "the successive re-interpretations of the original message in the transmission of that message constitutes and embodies a scepticism about the transmission of information and about the possibility of objective knowledge" (1992: 383). Conrad's interest in subjectivity, and the complexity of his treatment of witnesses/narrators, are often seen as evidence of his literary modernism (Levenson 2009: 183). However, it is equally possible to position this in the popular tradition of detective literature, in which scepticism about narrative reflected "the diminished value placed on the testimony of witnesses in Anglo-American courtroom practice in the latter half of the century and

the rising authority in forensic science that was being accorded to material evidence and expert advice" (Thomas: 78).

The scientific alternatives to subjective testimony that began to emerge in the late nineteenth century included several which sought to map or read the human body. Bertillon's system of 'anthropometry' aimed, with the assistance of photography, to describe individual features so precisely as to create a system of infallible identification. However, as Thomas (1999: 23-4) argues, some applications of anthropometry were not merely descriptive, but driven by post-Darwinist racial and social theory. The Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso and his "cohort of biological positivists", drew from Darwin the inspiration for their theory that the "criminal body" was "marked by inherited, atavistic, physical anomalies". Anthropometry represented, therefore, "not just the development of a systematic semiology of the body, but the invention of a technology with which an elite class of professionals could deploy that knowledge in order to produce the truth by converting a suspect body into a readable text". A competing approach that swiftly prevailed over anthropometry (at least in Britain) was fingerprinting. Francis Galton provided the science in *Finger Prints* (1892), which Galton's associate Edward Henry, who had pioneered the use of fingerprinting as Inspector-General of Police in Bengal, put into practice when he succeeded Robert Anderson as the Metropolitan Police's Assistant Commissioner in 1901.

Fingerprints and anthropometry appear prominently in the detective fiction of the period. Conan Doyle's 'The Norwood Builder' (1903) and Freeman's *The Red Thumb-Mark* turn on forged fingerprints; the author's Introduction to the latter claims the novel to be a fictional commentary on Galton's "epoch-making monograph" (Freeman 2001: i, 78). Detective fiction presents anthropometry with its Darwinist

associations intact: criminals in the Holmes stories are frequently portrayed with the tell-tale characteristics of biological atavism. For example, Watson sees Beppo, the thief and murderer in 'The Six Napoleons' (1904), as animalistic: Beppo is "an alert, sharp-featured simian man with thick eyebrows, and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face like the muzzle of a baboon". He is "a lithe, dark figure, as swift and active as an ape", who "glared at us from the shadow of his matted hair, and once, when my hand seemed within his reach, he snapped at it like a hungry wolf" (Conan Doyle 1964: 182, 191-92). In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Dr Mortimer is an avowed admirer of Bertillon and a dedicated amateur anthropometrist in a story full of allusions to a primitive past impinging, atavistically, on a threatened present. Mortimer's "special hobby" is racial anatomy – he tells Holmes that he could differentiate with ease the skull of a Negro from that of an Esquimaux – and he recalls discussing with the late Sir Charles Baskerville "the comparative anatomy of the Bushman and the Hottentot" (Conan Doyle 1975a: 30). That Watson shares the same assumptions is evident in his description of the escaped convict Selden's "evil yellow face":

> a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hillsides. The light beneath him was reflected in his small, cunning eyes, which peered fiercely to right and left through the darkness, like a crafty and savage animal who has heard the steps of the hunters. (Conan Doyle 1975a: 115)

The most revealing indication of Watson's prejudices in this story comes with his encounter with Laura Lyons. On first impressions, she is beautiful; with hindsight, he recalls "afterthoughts" of "something subtly wrong with the face, some coarseness

of expression, some hardness, perhaps, of eye, some looseness of lip which marred its perfect beauty" (Conan Doyle 1975a: 130). Ossipon's encounter with Winnie after the murder of Verloc has some striking similarities with this passage. Watson's "afterthoughts" are, we infer, influenced by his knowledge of Lyons's extra-marital relationship with Stapleton. Ossipon remains sexually attracted to Winnie – "'I've been fond of you beyond words ever since I set eyes on your face,' he cried, as if unable to command his feelings" (*SA* 242) – until he sees Verloc's corpse. He immediately adjusts his view to categorize Winnie in anthropometric terms, a categorization that suggests he almost has a religious relationship with scientific criminology's most controversial advocate:

> He was scientific, and he gazed scientifically at that woman, the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself – of a murdering type. He gazed at her, and invoked Lombroso, as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint. He gazed scientifically. He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears … Bad! … Fatal! Mrs Verloc's pale lips parting, slightly relaxed under his passionately attentive gaze, he gazed also at her teeth … Not a doubt remained … a murdering type … If Comrade Ossipon did not recommend his terrified soul to Lombroso, it was only because on scientific grounds he could not believe that he carried about him such a thing as a soul.[7] (222)

While detective fiction usually associated theories of scientific criminology with the detective and his *confidant*, Conrad here can be seen playing with our expectations by turning the anarchist into the criminologist, enabling a satirical treatment of Ossipon, who famously conforms to Lombroso's theories as well as articulating them.[8]

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[7] Lombroso's 'Criminal Anthropology' (1897) identifies a category of "insane criminals" he names "Mattoids" whose "lunacy" breaks out in "transitory madness" – in some cases with violent attacks using whatever weapon is at hand. Hampson (1988: 327) suggests that Conrad may have had this category in mind in his characterization of Winnie.

[8] See, for example, Hampson (1988: 322).

There is a popular precedent for Ossipon in Leon Gonsalez, one of the eponymous anarchists in Edgar Wallace's best-seller *The Four Just Men*, and another disciple of criminal anthropology: "Leon, with a perplexed frown, kept his eyes fixed on the workman's face. Leon Gonsalez, scientist, physiognomist (his translation of the *Theologi Physiognomia Humana* of Lequetius is regarded today as the finest), was endeavouring to reconcile the criminal with the artisan" (Wallace 1978: 78). Wallace's narrator also cites another Italian criminologist: he describes another of the Four Just Men, Thery, as sufficiently notorious that "Signor Paolo Mantegazza, Director of the National Museum of Anthropology, Florence, had done Thery the honour of including him in his admirable work (see chapter on 'Intellectual Value of a Face'); hence I say that to all students of criminology and physiognomy, Thery must need no introduction" (Wallace 1978: 6). These passages, however, indicate an important difference between Wallace's treatment of criminology and Conrad's: Wallace uses criminal anthropology to add a measure of scientific respectability to one of the anarchists, and the narrator cites Mantegazza with approval. Wallace's perspective on forensic biology is, therefore, consistent with that of the mainstream of detective fiction: he believes in it. Conrad, by contrast, uses it as part of his wider, ironic critique of science.[9]

Conrad's response to scientific methods of detection, especially in fiction, is exemplified by Chief Inspector Heat's struggle to apply scientific and logical methods to his examination of Stevie's corpse in Chapter V of *The Secret Agent*. Heat begins with a successful deduction: "'You used a shovel,' he remarked, observing a sprinkling of small gravel, tiny brown bits of bark, and particles of splintered wood as fine as needles" (71). The narrator appears to confirm Heat's capability as a detective by

[9] For a fuller discussion of Conrad's critique of science in general and Lombroso in particular, see Hunter (1983), Chapter 5.

referring to “his trained faculties of an excellent investigator, who scorns no chance of information” (71-72). But Heat’s moment of Holmesian clarity immediately gives way to incomprehension – which the narrator, significantly, casts in the language of logic:

> He would have liked to trace this affair back to its mysterious origin for his own information. He was professionally curious. Before the public he would have liked to vindicate the efficiency of his department by establishing the identity of that man. He was a loyal servant. That, however, appeared impossible. The first term of the problem was unreadable – lacked all suggestion but that of atrocious cruelty. (72)

From this point, Heat’s limitations as a detective begin to be exposed by the narrator.

Holmes, by contrast, can read bodies and scenes of crime, as in his first encounter with a corpse in *A Study in Scarlet*. First, Holmes examines the approaches to the scene. Then, after questioning Lestrade and Gregson at the scene – who, like Heat, can find “no clue” (Conan Doyle 1980: 41) – he examines the body and the blood around it, with his eyes, his fingers and his nose. Watson, himself shaken by the horror of the scene, remarks: “So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted” (42). The contrast with Heat, battling “his physical repugnance” (*SA* 72), is stark. The role that Heat fulfils is analogous to that of a Lestrade or a Gregson. He is unable to interpret the corpse until he picks up the fragment of clothing which bears Verloc’s address. Through sheer luck he is suddenly able, literally, to read the problem: “It was as if Fate had thrust that clue into his hands” (73). In this, he does better than Lestrade and Gregson in their misreading of the word “Rache”. However, in another way Heat is more culpable with respect to the written clue: Gregson and Lestrade’s misreading is an honest mistake, but Heat’s decision to suppress the meaning of the label show him

subordinating truth to the preservation of his "system". Conan Doyle questions the professionals' competence, while Conrad's implicit criticism of Heat is an ethical one.

Unobtrusive Shadows

The Assistant Commissioner's announcement that, rather than instruct Heat, he will intervene personally in the Greenwich bombing case, and interview Verloc, causes Sir Ethelred to ask if he will do so in disguise (111). The Assistant Commissioner disavows the use of disguise, replying that he will merely change his clothes, yet when he does so he succeeds more than he expects in altering his appearance: "The short jacket and the low, round hat […] brought out wonderfully the length of his grave, brown face. He stepped back into the full light of the room, looking like the vision of a cool, reflective Don Quixote, with the sunken eyes of a dark enthusiast and a very deliberate manner" (114). He completes the transformation by turning up both his collar and the ends of his moustache and getting himself "a little splashed". In order to return to polite society in the house of the Lady Patroness, he changes his clothes again (168). The Assistant Commissioner thus becomes a disguised detective without wishing it.

In transforming his appearance despite his disavowal of disguise, the Assistant Commissioner resembles professional detectives, both fictional and real, who scorned what they saw as the theatrical excesses of the amateur sleuths, and yet succeeded, apparently unwittingly, in playing a part. Superintendent Falmouth in *The Four Just Men* – a counter-anarchist specialist, like Chief Inspector Heat – regards disguise as essential while deploring more theatrical applications. Donning a pair of motoring goggles, he tells the Foreign Secretary, "'This is the only disguise I ever adopt'", before adding "with some regret, 'that this is the first time in twenty-five years of

service that I have ever played the fool like a stage detective'" (85). His modest but effective disguise has an unexpected consequence as it enables one of the Four Just Men to impersonate him by imitating his disguise. The working-class detective Joe Chandler in Belloc Lowndes's *The Lodger* (1913), on the trail of 'The Avenger' who is murdering London street-women, adopts the disguise of a "public house loafer"; despite adopting only a modest change of appearance, he nonetheless undergoes a theatrical transformation: "he looked the part to perfection, with his hair combed down raggedly over his forehead, his seedy-looking, ill-fitting, dirty clothes, and greenish-black pot hat" (Belloc Lowndes 1947: 204). Among the real detectives, Littlechild devotes a chapter of his *Reminiscences* to 'How I Have Used Disguises – "Makes Up" That Are Not Often Suspected', asserting that used "judiciously", disguise associated with a trade or profession, such as "a butcher's smock, apron and steel", will make a detective unrecognizable, contrasting this with the false moustaches and beards of "the detective of the stage" (Littlechild 1894: 76).[10]

Despite their protestations about the excesses of fictional or theatrical disguises, real detectives evidently considered disguise to be an operational necessity. The defensiveness of their arguments is understandable given the sharp political and public debate over the legitimacy of plain-clothes policing that had accompanied the rise of a professional detective force in the nineteenth century. Plain-clothes policing, and its extension into the use of disguise, was controversial because it engaged anxieties about civil liberty and subterfuge by the state. The issue was so controversial in the early years of the Metropolitan Police that the activities of police sergeant

[10] The 'disguised detective' trope was particularly associated with the stage Holmes – specifically the American actor-playwright William Gillette's adaptation*, Sherlock Holmes*, which had been a popular success when it played in London in 1901-1902 (Kabatchnik 2008: 15-17). However, Littlechild may also have had in mind an earlier stage detective, Hawkshaw in Tom Taylor's hugely popular *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863), who disguises himself as a navvy in "rough cap, wig, and whiskers" (1981: 69).

William Popay, accused of acting as an *agent provocateur* in infiltrating the National Political Union, prompted an investigation by a Parliamentary select committee in 1833 that paid particular attention to his not being in uniform. The committee concluded that plain-clothes policing was acceptable only if "strictly confined to detect Breaches of the Law and to prevent Breaches of the Peace, should these ends appear otherwise unattainable" (Emsley and Shpayer-Makov 2006: 7). The *Times* deplored in 1845 the use of plain clothes and aliases: "It is much to be regretted when any public body, abandoning the strict line of its legal functions, resorts to practices mischievous, or even suspicious, though for the purpose of attaining the legitimate objects of its original constitution". By the 1850s, however, the same newspaper – perhaps following Dickens's lead in *Household Words* – published laudatory articles about the successes of Field and his colleagues, suggesting that the plain-clothes force had become acceptable (Morris 2006: 81-2). By the 1880s, the *Police Code* stated that plain-clothes policing was simply a necessity:

> Although the idea that a detective, to be useful in a district, must be unknown, is erroneous in the great mass of cases […] it is nevertheless highly undesirable for detectives to proclaim their official character, to strangers by walking in step with each other, and in a drilled style, or by wearing very striking clothing, or police regulation boots, or by openly recognising constables in uniform, or saluting superior officers. (Vincent 1881: 105-6)

What answered the critics of such methods was the concern over police effectiveness. As Anderson had noted in his memoirs, an increasingly professional criminal class required a more intrusive and effective response, and the case for methods of subterfuge was also made in fiction. *The Lodger* – inspired by the Whitechapel Murders that had prompted such strong criticism of police competence – evokes the

public's combined sense of fear and prurience, its characters deriving their knowledge of The Avenger's murders from a press critical of the Metropolitan Police's constrained response. One newspaper opines that "detection of crime in London now resembles a game of blind man's buff, in which the detective has his hands tied and his eyes bandaged. Thus is he turned loose to hunt the murderer through the slums of a great city" (Belloc Lowndes 1947: 57). Chandler, the police detective who spends much of the novel in disguise, responds that the British police "haven't got the same facilities – no, not a quarter of them – that the French 'tecs have" (58). The arguments of the previous century – that methods used by the French would be unconstitutional in Britain – had given way to an acceptance, at least on the part of some popular authors, that the same methods were now required to protect the public.

Other texts however show that anxieties remained. One that explores the tension between British and French civil liberties is Barr's *The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont:* Valmont, dismissed from the French detective force, sets up in London as a private detective, where he knowingly comments that his methods, including using the disguise of an elderly anarchist living in a Soho slum, would be unacceptable in a British force. Disguise used by amateurs also raises ethical problems. Sherlock Holmes's theatrical disguises enable him to gather information unobserved, preserve his safety, and gain access to places, people and objects by subterfuge, as in 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891) in which, disguised as a clergyman, he infiltrates Irene Adler's household in an ultimately futile plan to steal a compromising photograph. Such subterfuge invites a comparison with the detective's adversaries who deploy similar techniques, such as the "gentleman" Neville St. Clair in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' (1891) disguising himself as a beggar, or Stapleton in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* who uses several layers of deception – two elaborate false identities, a

wife disguised as a sister, and at times a false beard. The mirroring relationship of detective and villain is clearer still in the Raffles stories, in which Inspector Mackenzie and Raffles confront each other in physical disguises – which, ultimately, both are able to penetrate. The disguised detective and disguised villain are even, in the case of Guy Boothby's *A Prince of Swindlers* (1900), the same person: the gentleman-thief Simon Carne deploys numerous outlandish disguises, including that of 'Klimo', a private detective. Similarly, Clifford Ashdown's Romney Pringle (1902) uses disguise as a daily precaution in his efforts to detect crime in order to profit from it himself.[11]

Disguise therefore is both a necessary weapon in the war between detective and criminal, and, more troublingly, a technique that connects and elides the two roles. *The Secret Agent* explores this elision both explicitly and impressionistically through the novel's imagery. The narrator discusses the essential similarity between the police officer and the criminal when Heat and the Professor – whose fanaticism removes him from the moral compromises required in the detection and commission of conventional crimes – confront each other:

> the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer. Both recognize the same conventions, and have a working knowledge of each others' methods and of the routine of their respective trades. They understand each other, which is advantageous to both, and establishes a sort of amenity in their relations. Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same. (*SA* 74-75)

The implication of this passage is rather different from the argument of real detectives, i.e. that disguise was required in order to operate covertly amongst criminals. In Heat's

[11] 'Clifford Ashdown' was the pseudonym used by R. Austin Freeman and J.J. Pitcairn.

view, there is a useful relationship between the detective and the criminal that keeps the latter in check through familiarity. The Assistant Commissioner, on the other hand, like the real detectives changes his appearance primarily to enable his entry into the criminal underworld, which he does as part of his challenge to Heat's "old methods" involving the pragmatic exploitation of relationships between detective and criminal. As he does so, the novel explores impressionistically the contrasting domains of ordered officialdom and unruly underworld.

This is signalled by the curious effect of the Assistant Commissioner's change of clothes on those around him. Heat recognizes him from Winnie's description (154), but others – Winnie, Toodles, the Assistant Commissioner himself, and the narrator – think the change in appearance makes him appear "foreign" (114, 150, 162). That this is noticed four times by different people suggests it has some importance. What his disguise facilitates is his entry into an oceanic underworld in which he is able to operate unnoticed:

> He left the scene of his daily labours like an unobtrusive shadow. His descent into the street was like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off. […] When he emerged into the Strand out of a narrow street by the side of Charing Cross Station the genius of the locality assimilated him. He might have been but one more of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about there flitting round the dark corners. (*SA* 114)

He boards a hansom cab with the driver barely noticing his arrival, and, after alighting, he leaves "an effect of uncanny, eccentric ghostliness upon the driver's mind." He enters the "immoral atmosphere" of an Italian restaurant in Soho in which he "seemed to lose some more of his identity" (115). His change of appearance, then, is a visible correlative of his skill in assimilating himself into the multi-cultural environs of Soho

and its anarchists who, as I explain in Chapter 4 below, were assumed to be mostly foreign. Despite not going to elaborate lengths to disguise himself, this talented amateur is able to achieve an altered, "foreign" appearance almost by instinct.[12] As well as marking his amateur detective status, and enabling his entry into this foreign underworld, the disguise triggers a sequence of images – shadow, fish, ghost – that provide a vividly metaphorical exploration of the domains of order and disorder.

Systems of Supervision

When Chief Inspector Heat is introduced in Chapter V of *The Secret Agent*, the narrator emphasizes his professional knowledge and expertise. Heat is the "great expert" of his department, the "principal expert in anarchist procedure" and "the eminent specialist" (69). Heat's knowledge of anarchism apparently derives from his "system of supervision" that has numerous components. Heat's informer, Verloc, has a major role that will be examined in detail in the following chapter. There is also physical surveillance: officers from the Special Crimes Directorate are, Heat reveals to the Assistant Commissioner, on duty at Charing Cross and Victoria stations, where they have orders "to take careful notice" of Verloc's companions (102). We can also infer that information reaches Heat from the uniformed constables and disguised detectives patrolling Soho, Greenwich, Knightsbridge, and Westminster in the novel. Toodles remarks: "There's a constable stuck by every lamp-post, and every second person we meet between this and Palace Yard is an obvious 'tec'" (112). Verloc's "sphere" is "watched by the police" (46), and, although Heat denies that Verloc's shop is watched to the Assistant Commissioner, he is presumably the author of the "special

[12] Orczy's Lady Molly is similarly capable of effortless disguise which in one case makes her appear foreign: in 'A Day's Folly' she appears "dressed up to look like an extremely dignified *grande dame* of the old school, while a pair of long, old-fashioned ear-rings gave a curious, foreign look to her whole appearance" (Orczy 1910: 129).

instructions" about the shop given to the constable on duty: "what went on about there was not to be meddled with unless absolutely disorderly, but any observations made were to be reported" (214). The novel's anarchists also assume that the police's supervision is sufficient to give complete knowledge of their whereabouts and actions. Discussing the attempted bombing, the Professor archly suggests that Ossipon "might ask the police for a testimonial of good conduct. They know where every one of you slept last night." Similarly, Ossipon reasons that "the police could have no special reason for watching Verloc's shop more closely than any other place known to be frequented by marked anarchists – no more reason, in fact, than for watching the doors of the Silenus. There would be a lot of watching all round" (63-64). The anarchists assume that surveillance is a fact of their existence.

This evocation of a surveillance society extends its exploration of the balance of liberty and security. For Heat, the system has a simple purpose – fulfilling "his defensive mandate of a menaced society" by protecting the public (68). He regrets the "laying waste" of his system after the exposure of Verloc's role, with its "fields of knowledge, which, cultivated by a capable man, had a distinct value for the individual and for the society" (159). Indeed, to Heat's mind his supervision protects its subjects as well as the wider public: he thinks of the anarchists as his "flock" (78), implying that he watches over them as a shepherd or vicar. This apparently reassuring purpose of police surveillance is also evident in the period's detective fiction, which often similarly emphasizes the role of professional detectives and their uniformed colleagues in preserving public order against disruptive threats and in assuring the quiescence of communities of foreign anarchists. For instance, when the amateur detective Dr Thorndyke meets his official colleague Inspector Badger in Oxford Street in 'The

Moabite Cipher' (1909), Badger reveals he is on surveillance duty as a result of a visit to London by a Russian Grand Duke. Badger has an anarchist suspect in view:

> 'He don't look like a foreigner, but he has got something bulky in his pocket, so I must keep him safely in sight until the Duke is safely past. I wish,' he added gloomily, 'these beastly Russians would stop at home. They give us no end of trouble. […] [T]he whole route is lined with plain-clothes men. You see, it is known that several desperate characters followed the Duke to England, and there are a good many exiles living here who would like to have a rap at him.' (Greene 1970: 226-7)

In this case, the threat to a visiting nobleman justifies large-scale surveillance of the public, but the civil-political implications are not spelled out. Although we learn that the individual being watched because he has a bulky object in his pocket is not an anarchist, the surveillance is justified when he turns out to be a member of a gang of thieves. In other cases, anarchists are kept under observation even though they are known not to be a threat, but with the implication that this is the alternative to more oppressive, and foreign, methods of control. In B. Fletcher Robinson's 'The Story of Amaroff the Pole' (1905), the professional detective Addington Peace, investigating the murder of a Polish anarchist, justifies the British approach of relying on surveillance of "foreign colonies": "On the Continent – well, we should be running them in, and they would be throwing bombs, but here no one troubles them as long as they pay rent and taxes, and keep their hands out of each other's pockets or from each other's throats' (Fletcher Robinson 1998: 10). Like Heat's guarding of his "flock", Addington Peace's system is as protective as it is supervisory: as in *The Secret Agent*,

his information shows that the perpetrator is not another anarchist but the Russian Secret Service.[13]

By presenting detectives as repositories of knowledge derived from surveillance, and by emphasizing foreign anarchists as its targets, detective fiction legitimized those surveillance activities. In this, the genre has been seen as responding to the growth of the metropolis in general, and its immigrant populations in particular. In his 1901 essay 'A Defence of Detective Stories', G.K. Chesterton characterized the detective genre as a distinctively metropolitan one, which realized "the poetry of London" (Chesterton 1901: 120). In Chesterton's analysis, this is a poetry of chaos that results from the size of the city and the complexity of its social and ethnic composition. *The Secret Agent*, with its celebrated descriptions of an entropic, decaying, and multi-ethnic city, can be seen as an example of Chesterton's "poetry of London" – something that Conrad himself came close to acknowledging in his account in the 'Author's Note' of the genesis of the novel. Conrad says he was inspired by a "vision of an enormous town […] a monstrous town more populous than some continents […]. There was room enough there to place any story, depth enough there for any passion, variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives" (6). The detective story turns the "monstrous town" into an aesthetic spectacle, while showing the threats within it being contained by the vigilance of the detectives, whom Chesterton describes as "the unsleeping sentinels who guard the outposts of society" against "the criminals, the children of chaos, [who] are nothing but the traitors within our gates" (Chesterton 1901: 122-23). His essay is a defence not only of detective stories but also of systems of supervision: his conclusion that "the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and

[13] See also Chapter 3 p. 163 below.

protected is only a successful knight-errantry" implies an acceptance of methods that had been seen elsewhere as unconstitutional. Chesterton's language in justifying this position is significant: "outposts", "traitors", and "gates" together suggest borders being guarded against foreign incursion, with the contradictory implications of outposts marking the limits of colonized space and immigrants already being present inside those limits. Detective fiction, therefore, can be seen as providing reassurance on two points: that subversive communities are being supervised, and that the supervision is focused on "alien" communities, not on the population at large.

Conrad's novel engages in these issues but not quite as straightforwardly as a reader of detective stories might expect. *The Secret Agent*'s examination of liberty and security exposes the limitations of both the detective and his system of supervision. Heat recalls regretfully his overly confident assurances to Sir Ethelred prior to the bombing and, after it, assures the Assistant Commissioner that "none of our lot had anything to do with this" (70). The Assistant Commissioner's reply captures the contradiction of knowledge of the presumed actors and ignorance of the act: "I quite appreciate the excellent watch kept on them by your men. On the other hand, this, for the public, does not amount to more than a confession of ignorance" (78). Heat is not the only detective in the period's fiction whose supervision fails to prevent and detect an outbreak of violence: Addington Peace can only look on – literally – as an associate of the murdered Polish anarchist Amaroff takes revenge on the Russian spymaster Nicolin by blowing him up with a bomb in a bust of Nero, while Wallace's Superintendent Falmouth, with "a hopeless look", complains: "You can't catch men when you haven't got the slightest idea who or what you're looking for. […] Why, we don't even know their nationality! […] We've pulled in all the suspicious characters we know" (Wallace 1978: 33-4). *The Secret Agent*, however, offers an examination of

Heat and his system that is strikingly epistemological. His comprehensive information does not, despite his claims to the contrary, provide the crucial knowledge, which, as the narrator points out, shows that Heat lacks "[t]rue wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions":

> His wisdom was of an official kind, or else he might have reflected upon a matter not of theory but of experience that in the close-woven stuff of relations between the conspirator and police there occur unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time. A given anarchist may be watched inch by inch and minute by minute, but a moment always comes when somehow all sight and touch of him are lost for a few hours, during which something (generally an explosion) more or less deplorable does happen. (69)

Heat's certainty is misplaced, because he fails to understand the impossibility of complete knowledge. Moreover, his shortcomings are not merely philosophical. Despite his reputation for expertise, which is disclosed at his earliest appearance in the novel, we soon learn that he finds anarchism in general, and the Professor in particular, inexplicable. Heat "could understand the mind of a burglar", but he dismisses anarchism as "foolishness" and the Professor as a "[l]unatic" (74, 78).

The Secret Agent also offers a more challenging examination of the ethics of surveillance than can be found in most of the period's genre fiction. Like Addington Peace's system, Heat's system can be seen as a more benign answer to social threats than the violent and arbitrary responses which both Vladimir and the Professor seek to provoke: as the latter puts it, "[n]othing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public" (60). The positive morality of Heat's approach appears to be confirmed by his rejection, when challenged by the Professor, of arbitrary powers: "If I were to lay my

hands on you now I would be no better than yourself". However, Heat immediately concedes that "[i]t may yet be necessary to make people believe that some of you ought to be shot at sight like mad dogs" (76). Furthermore, police surveillance's function of reassurance is challenged by the fact that the member of the public who, at least initially, is most reassured by the police system is the one least equipped to understand it: Stevie "had formed for himself an ideal conception of the metropolitan police as a sort of benevolent institution for the suppression of evil. The notion of benevolence especially was very closely associated with his sense of the power of the men in blue" (133). Moreover, his sister's disillusioned view of the purpose of law enforcement critically is a negative reflection of her husband's belief in the necessity of protecting "property" and "opulence" (15): "Don't you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have" (133). In Winnie's analysis, police surveillance is a means of ensuring the continuation of an exploitative economic system. The detective genre tradition had previously located such suppressive tendencies in foreign societies, such as Tsarist Russia (as I shall explore in Chapter 3), France (exemplified by Eugène Valmont), and Mormon societies in the United States. For example, R.L. and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's story 'The Squire of Dames' in *More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter* (1885) presents Brigham Young's Mormon society as totalitarian: "It is disquieting, indeed, to find our acts so spied upon, and the most private known. But is this new? Have we not long feared and suspected every blade of grass?" (Stevenson and Stevenson: 24). The image of an eye is painted onto rocks to remind the population of this ubiquitous surveillance, which is so powerful that it is feared to extend to London: "Often, in our conversation, he would gloat over the details of that great organization, which he feared even while yet he wielded it; and would remind me

that, even in the humming labyrinth of London, we were still visible to that unsleeping eye in Utah" (43). Conan Doyle followed the Stevensons' lead closely in *A Study in Scarlet*, in which Brigham Young again presides over a ruthless surveillance state. Heat's system is not, of course, as ruthless or as ubiquitous, but its potential threat to liberty is evident nevertheless.

Lacking the resources of the state – the personnel whom Heat, Falmouth, and Addington Peace can call upon in order to monitor public spaces and communities – the amateur detectives necessarily defer to the officials when a case requires surveillance. However, Sherlock Holmes finds an ingenious solution to the problem of watching suspects without official resources by recruiting a force of "street arabs" – the 'Baker Street Irregulars' – to keep watch on suspects. Indeed, Holmes comments that his irregulars are more effective than their official counterparts: "'There's more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force,' Holmes remarked. 'The mere sight of an official-looking person seals men's lips. These youngsters, however, go everywhere, and hear everything'" (Conan Doyle 1980: 66). *The Secret Agent*'s amateur detective could, by virtue of his official position, presumably call upon departmental resources, yet, as we have seen, he chooses not to do so. This clearly reflects the Assistant Commissioner's decision not to rely on Heat to conclude the case, and, more fundamentally, suggests that he distrusts not only the man but also the system. As he puts it himself to Sir Ethelred, he is motivated by his "new man's antagonism to old methods" (112). This antagonism is surprising, given his experience in the "tropical colony" where he "had been very successful in breaking up certain nefarious secret societies amongst the natives" (79-80). Despite his background in suppressing "native" groups, when in London the Assistant Commissioner is concerned not about the terrorist threat from the city's

"secret societies", but manifestations of state power. Indeed, the Assistant Commissioner has "crusading instincts" in resolving the case, but makes clear to Mr Vladimir that his objective is "the clearing out of this country all the foreign political spies, police, […] a ghastly nuisance" (168, 171). The novel, ultimately, does offer reassurance, but with a markedly different argument from the detective fiction that it otherwise resembles: it argues that security comes from liberty, rather than seeing the two in tension. The "old methods" of police surveillance are implicitly rejected and replaced with a successful determination to remove from Britain the malign, oppressive forces of foreign state surveillance.

Conclusion

The Secret Agent's presentation of Heat and the Assistant Commissioner reveals many of the interests, assumptions, and anxieties that were present throughout the detective genre in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods: the rise of new professions and the challenges this presented to assumptions about class; the fallibility of human perception; the increasing claims of science, which extended beyond scientific limits into social and racial theory; and the implications of covert policing methods for a national ideology that emphasized rights and liberty. As I have argued, *The Secret Agent*'s handling of these themes differs in some respects from what we would expect in a detective story: its scepticism about science and criminology, and its challenge to the genre's generally supportive view of state supervision, are two significant departures. These points of similarity and difference are, however, insufficient to explain *The Secret Agent*'s position as a canonical, literary, and privileged text, in contrast to the populist fiction that, as I have attempted to show, Conrad sought to rewrite. Indeed, the novel's resemblance to detective fiction has

prompted some critics to seek to distance it from the genre by asserting its superior literary value. Such an approach is exemplified by Cedric Watts (1984: 36-38) in his comparison of the novel with Conan Doyle's 'The Empty House' (1903) in which murder of the Hon. Ronald Adair is investigated by Sherlock Holmes after his return from self-imposed exile following his presumed death at the hands of Professor Moriarty. According to Watts, Conrad "reverses the procedures and subverts the conventions of the detective novel" by revealing "the instigator and agent of the crime" prior to the introduction of the detectives so that "we watch the process of detection (by Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner) with critical fore-knowledge, realising that the story says more about urban life and the ironies of politics than does any contemporaneous detective story or crime novel". However, as we have seen, the period's detective fiction is not as monolithic as Watts seems to assume. In many of the Holmes stories it is obvious who has instigated the crime or crimes, while the revelation in 'The Empty House' of Colonel Sebastian Moran's guilt in the murder, and his association with the criminal mastermind Professor Moriarty, occurs well before the story's conclusion. "Urban life" is, as Chesterton pointed out, a preoccupation of the genre, and Watts, ironically, has chosen as good an example as any in 'The Empty House', with its evocation of the aristocratic underworld of gambling clubs that has a topographical emblem in the dilapidated (yet fashionably located) empty house itself in which Holmes and Watson observe Moran fire his air-rifle at the wax bust of Holmes silhouetted in his Baker Street window.

Watts also asserts that there are "conspicuous contrasts in nature, strategy and implication between the enigmas of covert plots and the lesser enigmas of detective stories," as *The Secret Agent*, for example, "deliberately confuses us about the nature of the disaster in the park". However, 'The Empty House' also deliberately confuses us

about many things: the identity of the 'bibliophile' (Holmes in disguise); the reliability of the evidence at the inquest (in which one of the witnesses is in fact the murderer); the 'locked-room' mystery of how Adair came to be killed. All of these mysteries are explained, but so is the mystery of Greenwich Park. Furthermore, Watts adds that detective fiction "offers a basically conventional and conservative polarity: on the one hand are the forces of law, order, justice and decency; on the other are the forces of vice and crime." Again, 'The Empty House' disproves this assertion: Adair is, on the surface, a blameless scion of an aristocratic family with "no particular vices" (Conan Doyle 1964: 8), who was murdered, Holmes suggests, because he had discovered Moran, his partner at whist, was a cheat. However, Conan Doyle carefully arranges the facts of the story to suggest an alternative, covert plot: Adair was an habitual card-player whose engagement had been broken off "by mutual consent" for reasons left unexplained, and in partnership with Moran had previously won £420 at the sitting; at the murder scene, he had locked the door, was counting his winnings, and had by him notes apparently recording earlier gains and losses (8). The official explanation, supported by Holmes's conjectures, is, we might suspect, a fiction, designed to protect Adair's aristocratic family, including his father (an earl and a governor of an Australian colony), from scandal. This alternative interpretation is missed by Watts who correctly reads Conrad's novel as questioning "the conventional polarity by suggesting some resemblances between the forces of law and the forces of anarchy" (Watts 1984: 38), but cannot admit that detective fiction is capable of doing the same: in this case Holmes spends much of the story deceiving others for a variety of reasons.

"Conan Doyle's enigmas", Watts claims, "deflect attention from political questioning", yet 'The Empty House' is notably rich in politically suggestive allusions to Britain's imperial commitments and ambitions: as well as the colonial governorship

held by Adair's father, Moran is the son of a former British minister to Persia, has distinguished himself in military service in Afghanistan, and is "the best heavy game shot that our Eastern Empire has ever produced" (23, 26). While Moran and perhaps Adair show the corruption of Britain's imperial endeavour, Holmes represents its active and assertive spirit: he has spent the time in which he was presumed dead productively exploring the Empire's frontiers – visiting Mecca in disguise, travelling through Persia (partly occupied by Britain by the end of the nineteenth century) and the Sudan, and, notably, spending two years in Tibet (16). This sojourn would have had a strong contemporary resonance in 1903, when Francis Younghusband's expedition to (or invasion of) Tibet was causing substantial public excitement and controversy (French 1994: 202-3). Holmes's passing reference to communicating with the Foreign Office from Sudan suggests a covert plot in which Holmes was doing more in Africa and Asia than merely hiding from Moriarty's agents.

Watts's analysis exemplifies the prejudices about detective stories censured by Chesterton in his 1901 essay:

> The trouble in this matter is that many people do not realize that there is such a thing as a good detective story; it is to them like speaking of a good devil. […] There is, however, between a good detective story and a bad detective story as much, or, rather more, difference than there is between a good epic and a bad one. Not only is a detective story a perfectly legitimate form of art, but it has certain definite and real advantages as an agent of the public weal. (Chesterton 1901: 118-19)

The difference in Conrad's questioning of the "conventional polarities" is that it is more philosophical, psychological, and metaphorical than most detective fiction would permit. The narrator's epistemological analysis of Heat and his system, and the penetration of Heat's psychology, mark him out as a character in a different sort of

fiction from, for example, ‘The Empty House’. Heat’s reaction to Stevie’s body – his rise “above the vulgar conception of time” to conceive “that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye” (71) – could not be imagined in a story featuring Sherlock Holmes. However, in celebrating the technical and aesthetic achievements that distinguish Conrad’s novel from the detective fiction with which it shares so much, we should not dismiss the genre that provided so much material for Conrad’s creative experimentation.

Chapter 2

"An Actor in Desperate Earnest":

Informers and Spies

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that *The Secret Agent* is distanced from detective fiction by the philosophical and psychological treatment of themes and tropes from the genre. In the first part of this chapter, I continue the exploration of detective fiction by focusing on one of the police detective's methods, the use of informers, examining Conrad's 1906 short story 'The Informer' as well as *The Secret Agent*. My analysis of the police informer in the detective genre and Conrad's fiction will focus on the ethical and political implications of this character type, to examine further how the two narratives handle some of the questions raised in my first chapter concerning the balance of security and liberty in society, and the ethical conduct of those involved in striking that balance. I then examine Verloc's role as an informer not for the police but for the nation – unidentified but clearly Tsarist Russia – represented by the Embassy in Chesham Square. This second part of the chapter brings in *Under Western Eyes* (1911) to examine the informer as spy working against a background of national and international power politics, comparing Conrad's treatment with that of the writers credited with creating the emerging genre of espionage fiction, such as William Le Queux, Erskine Childers, and Rudyard Kipling, to show how Conrad explored the moral and psychological problems of espionage.

The political and ethical questions with which Conrad engages in these texts were contentious, and the debates surrounding them inflected the informer's

representation in fiction. Indeed, as I intend to show, the role of the informer or spy in the fictions examined here was a means of exploring issues of contemporary concern, and sometimes asserting ideological positions. It is therefore necessary to provide some context by setting out the parameters of these debates. To show how closely fictional texts, their creative production, and their historical and social contexts are related, I shall set out the context for the first part of this chapter by examining two of Conrad's acknowledged sources of inspiration for *The Secret Agent*: Anderson's *Sidelights*, and the knowledge, contacts, and texts associated with Conrad's erstwhile collaborator, Ford Madox Hueffer. These two sources exemplify the opposing ideological stances in the contemporary debate over security and liberty, covert policing and the ethics of information.

Systematic Informers

In the 'Author's Note' to *The Secret Agent*, Conrad reveals (albeit inaccurately) that the "little passage of about seven lines" in Anderson's *Sidelights* that "arrested" him and then "stimulated" the novel's creation (*SA* 6) was Anderson's account of his relationship with Sir William Harcourt, when the latter was Home Secretary in Gladstone's Liberal Government of 1880-1885 and the former a senior Home Office official responsible for countering Fenian activity in North America. Sherry (1971: 288-90) notes that Conrad's recollection of the book conflates two passages concerning Harcourt. The first passage related to a friendly meeting between the two men in 1889, when Harcourt was Leader of the Opposition, in the House of Commons lobby which had followed a previous encounter when Harcourt had failed to recognise Anderson (Anderson 1906: 21). The second passage related to an earlier incident, when Harcourt was Home Secretary and Anderson his employee, over the handling of

informers. Despite the two men having a friendly and effective working relationship, Anderson's commitment to protecting the identities of his informants "was always a sore point with Sir William Harcourt. 'Anderson's idea of secrecy is not to tell the Secretary of State,' he once said to one of his colleagues, fixing his eyes on me as he spoke" (Anderson 1906: 89). Anderson adds that Harcourt's complaint was well-founded: his first informer had been murdered as a result of loose talk among senior officials in Ireland, after which he made it a point of principle to protect informers' identities from even the most senior figures. Conrad's conflated version places Harcourt's "angry sally" with Anderson in the Lobby of the House of Commons: "All that's very well. But your idea of secrecy over there seems to consist of keeping the Home Secretary in the dark" (6).

The cause of the breakdown in relations between the two men was Anderson's principal informer, 'Major Henri Le Caron' – born Thomas Miller Beach in Colchester – who after serving in the Federal Army in the American Civil War, became involved in Fenian groups in America, and was recruited as an informer by Anderson in 1867. During their twenty-year covert relationship, Anderson guarded Le Caron's identity closely, withholding it not only from Harcourt but also from the police who were responsible for countering Fenian activity in London: "The fact is that, until he appeared as a witness at the Special Commission, 'Scotland Yard' was not aware of his existence" (Anderson 1906: 25). Anderson's secrecy is echoed in *The Secret Agent* in Heat's comment to the Assistant Commissioner that "the department has no record" of Verloc (*SA* 99).

In his own memoirs, *Twenty-five Years in the Secret Service* (1892), Le Caron confirms the secrecy observed by Anderson: "To him, and to him alone, was I known as a Secret Service agent during the whole of the twenty-one years of which I speak.

Therein lay the secret of my safety. If others less worthy of the trust than he had been charged with the knowledge of my identity, then I fear I should not be here to-day on English soil quietly penning these lines" (Le Caron 1892: 271-72). Le Caron's memoirs, which went through eighteen editions between 1892 and 1895, and Anderson's were both written in response to their authors' involvement in a notable political scandal, arising from allegations in *The Times* in 1887 – based on forged letters – that the Irish Home Rule leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, had been involved in terrorism, prompting a judicial Inquiry in 1888-89.[1] Anderson revealed in *Sidelights* that he had agreed to return to Le Caron letters containing intelligence on Fenian activities that he had supplied to Anderson, so that Le Caron could use them in his evidence to the Inquiry, with the result that Harcourt – by this time Leader of the Opposition – "declared war" upon his former employee, condemning him publicly for unethical behaviour in supplying information which had become government property to a witness at the Inquiry (Anderson 1906: 7).

Anderson's and Le Caron's memoirs, then, were concerned with self-justification in relation to a particularly contentious sequence of events involving terrorism, fabricated allegations against an Irish nationalist leader, and public criticism of an official's handling of an informer. Even more relevant, both to the public debate over methods of state surveillance and to Conrad's representation of them, is how these memoirs sought to justify not only their authors' personal conduct but also the necessity of employing informers. Le Caron argued that informers should be paid more and used more systematically: "If plots are to be discovered in time – and already there are some whisperings of coming danger – they can only be discovered through information coming from those associated with them" (Le Caron 1892: 274-75). Le

[1] For background on the scandal, see Hampson (2012a: 79-80). Anderson revealed himself in 1910 as the author of the articles in *The Times*.

Caron also offered a more high-minded justification of his role and conduct. He referred to himself throughout his memoir as a "Secret Service agent" and protested that the designation of 'informer' was unworthy of him, rejecting its associations of betrayal and cupidity: "I have in no sense been an informer, as the phrase is understood. I allied myself with Fenianism in order to defeat it; I never turned from feelings of greed or gain on the men with whom I at first worked in sympathy." He also rejected any suggestion that he had acted as an *agent provocateur*, insisting that his conduct remained scrupulous throughout his career, even in the most testing circumstances when his Fenian associates were plotting violence: "Although I always voted for politic reasons on the side of the majority, even to the joining in the vote which meant dynamite, on no single occasion was I instrumental in bringing an individual to the commission of crime" (Le Caron 1892: 277).

Anderson rejected criticism of Le Caron, whom he described as "a man of sterling integrity and honour", refusing to designate him as "an informer", preferring instead to see him as of equal standing with the Scotland Yard detectives (Anderson 1906: 25-26), in contrast to Heat's comment on Verloc: "He isn't one of our men. It isn't as if he were in our pay" (*SA* 103). Anderson saw informers as a strategic technique for managing political crime:

> When in 1880 Sir William Harcourt sought my help I told him plainly that the attitude of the Government to political crime had always alternated between panic and indifference. In troublous times informants were eagerly sought for; but when the danger was over, I was looked upon as a "crank" for urging that they should be kept in pay. (Anderson 1906: 91)

The material that inspired Conrad, therefore, was an argument not only for the necessity of covert action by the state, but also that such action required extraordinary

secrecy – to protect the state's actions from public knowledge, and to control knowledge even within the state itself. What evidently struck Conrad was Harcourt's indignation over Anderson's conviction that the government should not know the full extent of what was being done in its name: the maintenance of what Heat calls a "system of supervision" takes precedence, in Anderson's view, over accountability to the electorate via the Secretary of State. Conrad's inspiration therefore centred on a revealing episode of political confrontation on the question of security versus accountability.

Anderson's and Le Caron's memoirs were part of a wider debate over the ethics of informers. The detectives who published memoirs during the period generally supported their use, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Littlechild referred to the informant or "nark" as "a humble and more or less regular auxiliary of the detective," although he warned against the informer's tendency to fabricate evidence and act as an *agent provocateur* (Littlechild 1894: 95-96). Moser attributed police successes during the Fenian bombing campaign in the 1880s to "the beneficent courage and intelligence of a large number of 'informers' in touch with the authorities here" (Moser & Rideal 1890: 21), although he too warned that, as they were usually motivated by self-interest, they should be handled with care and not trusted "as a body" (208). G.H. Greenman, a Victorian detective who published his memoirs in 1904, saw informers as something of an occupational hazard: "To place too much confidence in such a person is, to say the least, risky, for he will often draw small sums on account for current expenses, and finally deceive you. And yet one cannot altogether ignore him or do without him" (Greenman 1904: 61). A Special Branch detective, John Sweeney, took a more positive view of informers and the "knowledge" derived from them: "that the Yard may have its knowledge always fresh, there exists a system of constant espionage.

Fortunately for the public weal, rogues are always falling out, and so there are everywhere spies who supply the authorities with news, advice and warning" (Sweeney 1905: 34-35). The views of these detectives are consistent with the stipulations of the *Police Code* (1881), which assumed the necessity of informers whilst laying down a code of practice for their use, acknowledging that they were not without risk: "no reward can ever be given, from public funds, to an informer, until the value of his information has been tested in a court of law" (Vincent 1881: 202).[2] Official instructions and police memoirs therefore supported Anderson's view of the necessity of covert action by the state, especially to control and suppress political crime which was seen as being less susceptible to traditional policing methods than other crimes.

There were, however, dissenting views. One trenchant critic of the informer system was a disgraced former Special Branch detective, Patrick McIntyre, whose articles in *Reynolds's Newspaper* (February to May 1895) condemning the practice would have reached a mass audience.[3] In these articles, McIntyre attacked the use of informers as being alien to British traditions of liberty, and also ineffective, because informers had a vested interest in manufacturing or exaggerating information for financial reward. Significantly in this context, McIntyre's articles attributed the informer system to Anderson, and used the 1894 Greenwich Park bombing to illustrate some of his points.[4] In his first article, he portrayed Anderson's methods as a threat to British liberty:

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[2] The *Police Code* was part of the Metropolitan Police's reform of its Detective Department into the CID. Its author Howard Vincent, was the CID's first head. The Code's publication saw it become an unlikely popular success: it went through 15 editions between its publication in 1881 and 1912.

[3] With an estimated circulation of 350,000, and its republican, anti-establishment stance, *Reynolds's Newspaper* could claim to be a populist, mass-market weekly.

[4] McIntyre's account of the bombing was published on 28 April 1895 (p. 5).

> It will be shown to what extent a new system has been adopted by Mr Anderson, the present Assistant Commissioner of the Criminal Investigation Department – a system of espionage, not merely on political offenders or supposed offenders, but even on men employed as authorized detectives. This imitation of the methods familiar to readers of the history of the times of Vidocq or Richelieu is surely in little accordance with the usages of a free country. (3 February 1895: 5)

McIntyre's claim that Anderson used detective methods against his own staff finds an echo, in *The Secret Agent*, in the Assistant Commissioner's "propensity to exercise his considerable gifts for the detection of incriminating truth upon his own subordinates" (129).

McIntyre also examined the case of Auguste Coulon, an informer working for Melville in the 1890s in circles of London anarchism that included the Autonomie Club, one of whose members was Martial Bourdin, the Greenwich Park bomber, and which was raided by Melville a few hours after the explosion. Coulon was, famously, implicated in the 'Walsall Anarchists' plot, in which the arrest of an anarchist suspect from Walsall on his way to the Autonomie Club in January 1892 led to the conviction of four men for a bomb-making conspiracy. McIntyre and others – notably the editor of the anarchist newspaper *Commonweal*, David Nicoll – claimed not only that Coulon was an informer, but also that he had initiated the entire plot. McIntyre's presentation of Coulon in his articles as the exemplary *agent provocateur* was so hostile that Coulon attempted, unsuccessfully, to sue him for criminal libel.[5] McIntyre described the relationship between Melville and Coulon as possessive – he says that Coulon became Melville's "property" – but that Melville's superiors, Anderson and the Home Secretary, would undoubtedly have been aware of the case (14 April 1895: 5).

[5] *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 28 April 1895.

McIntyre thus presents a contradictory picture, with the senior detective and the senior official as jealously protective of their information, whilst also seeking to implicate the senior politician in their conspiratorial activities by claiming that the Home Secretary would have been fully briefed. This contrasts with Anderson's admission that he was unashamedly selective in what he told Harcourt, and Heat's attempts in *The Secret Agent* to conceal Verloc's role from the Assistant Commissioner. McIntyre's point, nevertheless, is clear: informers entail a degree of secrecy that is harmful to good policing, and good government, and the secrecy in turn allows *agent provocateurs* to flourish:

> These people see their opportunity when any Government is in a perturbed state of mind. […] Their intrigues produce more conspiracies. There is this difference between a detective and an *agent-provocateur* – that, whereas the former is paid by salary and has no interest in increasing crime, the latter is paid by results, and has to depend on the rise and fall of the "crime" thermometer. What does the "provocating agent" do when he finds the prevailing danger is diminishing in quantity? He manufactures more "danger"! (3 March 1895: 5)

McIntyre also saw foreign governments at work in the informer system, adding an additional, sinister dimension to the counter-anarchist milieu. McIntyre's articles show that the more sinister elements of the informer's role which feature in *The Secret Agent* – notably the informer's potential to fabricate and play the *agent provocateur*, the informer's direction from foreign governments serving their own national interests, and the overly secretive relationship between the informer and his police supervisors – were matters that had been in public discussion for more than ten years.

In his 'Author's Note', Conrad attributes the first suggestion for the story to an anecdote about the Greenwich bombing told by his "omniscient friend", Ford Madox

Hueffer.[6] Conrad would have known of the anarchist activities of Hueffer's cousins, Helen and Olivia Rossetti, who were associates of Auguste Coulon, as well as two of the editors of the *Commonweal*, David Nicoll and H.B. Samuels, the brother-in-law of the Greenwich bomber Martial Bourdin (Sherry 1971: 322, Newton 2007). Nicoll was the author of two polemical pamphlets, 'The Walsall Anarchists' (1894) and 'The Greenwich Mystery!' (1897), both of which claimed that the conspiracies alleged by the authorities were in fact the work of *agents provocateurs* – Coulon in the case of the Walsall plot, and Samuels in the Greenwich bombing. Conrad appears to have denied having read Nicoll's account of the latter, claiming (inaccurately or misleadingly) to have been overseas when the bombing occurred, while Sherry is sufficiently convinced that Conrad used it as a source that he reprinted it in full (Sherry 1971: 228-29). However, whatever Conrad did or did not read, what is beyond doubt is that in the anarchist milieu which included Hueffer's cousins, informers were regarded as a threat both to individuals and to the principles of freedom. Nicoll believed that the ultimate aim of the Greenwich bombing was to ease the introduction of the Aliens Bill to Parliament and facilitate the re-election of Salisbury's Conservative Government, and that its immediate effect would be the creation of a "political police" and a climate of fear: "it is high time that this hellish work was stopped, but while we have a 'political police', it is bound to continue" with "the distribution of explosives", "the arrest or violent death of the dupes" and "the provoking agents retiring from business, with the silver of Judas in their hands" (qtd. in Sherry 1971: 394). Nicoll's views of anarchism and counter-anarchism undoubtedly influenced an important source for 'The Informer' and *The Secret Agent*: the Rossettis' autobiographical novel, *A Girl Among the*

[6] For further details of Conrad's knowledge of anarchism, and Hueffer's connections, see Chapter 4 below.

Anarchists (1903), published under the pseudonym 'Isabel Meredith'.[7] This novel would have provided Conrad with authentic detail on anarchist activities in London: in his preface, Morley Roberts states: "There is nothing whatever […] which is invented […] I have no pleasure in saying that I know what she has written to be true" (Meredith 1903: v-vi). One of the "true" events reproduced in the novel was an account of the Greenwich Park bombing and its aftermath – re-located in the novel to Queen's Park (39-53, 61) – that follows closely Nicoll's account. The Rossettis also attribute authorship of the bombing to an informer and *agent provocateur*, Jacob Myers – based closely on Nicoll's political rival, H.B. Samuels.[8] The Rossettis' inclusion of a police informer in their (albeit autobiographical) novel therefore places it among the first fictional representations of this character type.[9] The case for Myers as a model for Verloc is strong, although they differ in appearance and, perhaps, in ethnicity. Myers is a "mean enough type of the East End sartorial Jew", and the narrator adds an anthropometric description to the racial labels:

> The low forehead, wide awake, shifty little eyes, the nose of his forefathers, and insolent lock of black hair plastered low on his brow – all these characteristics may frequently be met with in the dock of the "Old Bailey" when some case of petty swindling is being tried. (Meredith 1903: 44-45)

[7] See Mulry 2000: 43-64. Mulry argues, convincingly, that while Conrad denied having seen Nicoll's pamphlet, he probably read the Rossettis' book, not least because of their familial relationship with Hueffer. See also Sherry 1971: 213 .

[8] Samuels's identification as a model for Verloc (and Myers) was made by Sherry (1971: 314 et seq.) and amplified by several others, including Watts (2011).

[9] The police informer as both an historical phenomenon and a literary character type can be seen as a descendent of the "thief-taker" – a criminal who passed information on fellow-criminals to the authorities for financial gain. A notable literary example of the thief-taker is Gines in *Caleb Williams* (1794). I am grateful to Sophie Gilmartin for pointing out that one literary character who became a career informer after giving evidence against a criminal gang is Noah Claypole in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-9).

Conrad omits the Rossettis' racist characterization (Verloc's ethnicity is not specified), but follows their wholly negative representation of the informer's role and conduct. In the Rossettis' novel, Myers is tried at an anarchist tribunal, where the evidence shows he "had appeared to exercise undue influence and power over his brother Augustin" and had been seen drinking "in company with a well-known detective" (49); he is "accused of having egged on his unfortunate brother to his doom in order that he might turn a little money out of the transaction between newspaper reports and police fees" (50). One anarchist comments that his "conduct proves him to be no better than a spy" (52), while another sees the police informer as a symptom of social pathology, employing rhetoric that is similar to that of Nicoll's pamphlet: "Men like Myers are but the outcome of unnatural and vitiated conditions; they are produced by the very society which it is our object to abolish – as all manner of disease is produced by vitiated air. With better conditions such men will disappear; nay, the very possibility of their existence will be gone" (55). The narrator concludes: "That the whole conspiracy was a got-up affair between Jacob Myers and the police was evident." She adds, "political detectives would have a slow time of it in this country unless they occasionally made a vigorous effort on their own behalf, and an unscrupulous and impecunious man like Myers proved a valuable tool to help such gentlemen along" (71).[10] For Meredith, as for Nicoll, 'informer' and '*agent provocateur*' were indistinguishable.

Hueffer's own work at around this time was concerned with informers and espionage, and is another possible source of influence on Conrad's novel. Hueffer's historical sequence, starting with *The Fifth Queen* (1906), dedicated to Conrad, and

[10] The most senior, and most respected, of the political detectives in the narrative is Chief Inspector Deveril, probably based, like Conrad's Chief Inspector Heat, on William Melville, who was vilified in Nicoll's pamphlet (Sherry 1971: 387-93).

followed by *Privy Seal* (1907), and *The Fifth Queen Crowned* (1908), bears the imprint of debates over domestic espionage and the ethics of information. In Hueffer's novels, Cromwell presides over a police state where eavesdropping informers are routinely believed to be standing outside doors and behind tapestries, where newcomers to court such as Katharine Howard are assumed to be conducting espionage for one party or another, and where the spies Throckmorton and Lascelles are more in control of events than the King and his ministers. Most significantly, Hueffer shows Cromwell depending on the discovery of treacherous plots to maintain his status at court, and as his position comes under threat, he seeks a real or imaginary conspiracy to remind the King of his necessity.[11] Hueffer thus transposes to the Tudor court the allegations raised by critics, including in his own family and social circles, of the ethics of modern domestic espionage.

Informers in popular fiction were treated more sympathetically, yet remained ethically problematic. Although William Le Queux is known primarily for his invasion-scare and early espionage fiction, his prolific output includes a melodramatic detective novel, *The Seven Secrets* (1903), featuring a part-time, amateur detective, Ambler Jevons – "blender of teas and investigator of mysteries" (Le Queux 1903b: 13). Jevons operates a casual informant, a Cockney costermonger called 'Lanky' Lane, whose value, Le Queux's narrator reveals, is his ability to penetrate "the submerged tenth" of British society occupying places like Lane's home street in Shadwell, "a veritable hive of the lowest class of humanity" (Le Queux 1903b: 276-77). Jevons reveals that he was performing similar services for the Metropolitan Police: "Lane was a policeman's 'nose', and often obtained payment from Scotland Yard for information

[11] In *The Fifth Queen*, Cromwell sees Katharine as a possible answer to his concerns that "his power over the King fell away daily": "Therefore he was the more hot to discover a new Papist treason. The suggestion […] that Katharine might be made either to discover or to invent one had filled him with satisfaction" (Hueffer 1984: 131).

regarding the doings of a certain gang of thieves" (Le Queux 1903b: 296). Lane's function in the narrative is to permit access to this underworld, which – except to amateurs like Sherlock Holmes who are adept at disguise – is normally inaccessible to the amateur detectives hailing from higher social classes than their professional rivals. The informer also permits access for the novelist to these worlds: Lane is a kind of guide to the underworld that is Shadwell, permitting the imaginative exploration of regions of exotic poverty and criminality. However, what makes Lane valuable to the detective and the novelist also makes him a compromised figure, both morally and criminally: as well as being an informer, he is a blackmailer and a "ruffian" who is also employed by the novel's principal villain, a society doctor, and for reasons barely explicable in the novel's complicated, improvised plot, he is murdered (Le Queux 1903b: 312). Even in a novel as unsophisticated as this, the use of informers emerges as morally, legally, and socially problematic: Lane's value to both Jevons and the police derives from his criminal milieu, which, unlike the detectives, he can operate in because he is a criminal. His criminality, however, in Le Queux's ideological world, is also what makes him immoral, untrustworthy, and as useful to villains as to the forces of law and order. Le Queux, however, expends little effort on exploring the ethical complexities and contradictions of the informer role.

Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men* features a more attractive but also criminally tainted police informer. Billy Marks is a petty thief and police informant whose arrest by a uniformed constable for pickpocketing comes to the attention of his detective handler, Superintendent Falmouth. Unlike Le Queux, Wallace explores his informer's social, moral, and legal position, a precarious one at the intersection of criminality and authority. Marks is morally and legally compromised by his criminal trade, despite his covert relationship with Falmouth. This relationship with authority,

however, also makes his social position perilous: when he refuses to help Falmouth track down the Four Just Men, Falmouth pressures him into co-operating by threatening to reveal him as the source of information which had led to the conviction of a violent robber (Wallace 1995: 75). Marks's vulnerability to both his criminal and detective associates is part of what makes him a sympathetic character, compensating for any distaste the reader may feel at his habitual criminality; at the same time, Falmouth, resorting to desperate measures to prevent the Four Just Men's assassinating the Foreign Secretary, compromises his own morality in effectively blackmailing Marks into co-operating. Wallace then goes further, and increases at the same time Marks's vulnerability, and his potential for self-redemption, by giving him a change of role. When Marks reluctantly agrees to fulfil Falmouth's request, he goes from being the 'nark' or 'nose' of crime fiction, passively reporting what he knows to his police officer employer, to a secret agent, employed on a mission, or, in his own self-estimation, a hunter seeking his "prey" (Wallace 1995: 82). Marks signals this shift from a passive role as informer to an active one as a secret agent by posing as a police officer. However his own "cupidity" prevents him from achieving it when his greed leads him to overplay his hand: he locates one of the Just Men, Poiccart, in the London streets but, rather than simply report back to Falmouth, Marks attempts to bring Poiccart to justice himself in the hope of obtaining a greater reward (Wallace 1995: 81). His reward, in fact, is to be murdered with cyanide gas in a train. Marks dies as a lowlife criminal 'nark' who has failed to grasp his opportunity to become a secret agent; at the same time, Marks is a victim in this narrative, forced into his new and perilous role by pressure from authority, and overmatched by his own quarry. Wallace thus reverts to a similar position as Le Queux in representing the informer as criminal first and foremost, while also enabling a more sympathetic exploration of the

informer's role that challenges the simple moral dichotomy of criminality and authority. Popular fiction, then, was capable of some moral complexity in its handling of the informer role, while stopping short of the condemnation of the informer system on principle that is evident in McIntyre's or the Rossettis' works. The examples examined here also suggest an assumption by their authors that the behaviour of informers was conditioned by their membership of a criminal 'class', rather than being the symptom of a more fundamental political malaise.

When he began work on 'The Informer' in 1905 and what began as a short story entitled 'Verloc' in February 1906, Conrad evidently was aware of the debate over informers, but at this point he may have been exposed to only one side of the argument, as presented in the Rossettis' and Hueffer's novels, possibly Nicoll's pamphlet, and perhaps McIntyre's articles. It was only after he had drafted the first three chapters of *The Secret Agent* that the other side of the debate, as represented by Anderson's justification of the informer system, became available when *Sidelights* was published in May 1906.[12] Perhaps unexpectedly, it is the earlier story that presents the informer in the most sympathetic light, whereas Verloc fulfils all of McIntrye's and Nicoll's warnings about informers. Conrad's first informer, Sevrin, is at least on the surface a sympathetic figure: like Marks, Sevrin's role requires him to occupy a perilous position, and the conflict between his role and his humanity – his love for the Lady Amateur – brings about his downfall. Furthermore, Sevrin himself reveals that he is an informer "from conviction", indicating that, unlike other fictional informers, Sevrin is neither criminally nor morally compromised (*SS* 97). In this he resembles Verloc, or at least Verloc in his self-estimation as being ideologically motivated, as when he surveys the "opulence and luxury" of the houses near Hyde Park: "All these

[12] See Harkness & Reid 1990, 240 et seq. for a detailed chronology of the composition of *The Secret Agent*.

people had to be protected" (15). Sevrin's motivation is, however, also psychological, as his diary, appropriated by Mr X from Sevrin's room after the latter's suicide, indicates. The diary suggests that Sevrin's decision to work for the police was the outcome of disillusionment, the collapse of his "vague but ardent humanitarianism", which had "in his first youth" taken the form of "the bitterest extremity of negation and revolt." This disillusionment in turn resulted from Sevrin being "not enough of an optimist", causing him, we infer, to doubt and then reject the anarchistic creed of perfectibility: as Mr X comments, "You must be a savage, tyrannical, pitiless, thick-and-thin optimist […] to make a good social rebel of the extreme type" (100-01). Nor is Sevrin an *agent provocateur*: there is nothing to suggest that he has initiated any of the anarchists' terroristic activities, such as the bomb-making and Horne's plan to blow up "the great public building", although he evidently knows about them, and Mr X assumes that "the police had evidently such confidence in the informer that the house, for the time being, was not even watched" (86-87). The police control events through Sevrin, but they do not, we can assume, inspire them.

However, judgments about Sevrin's morality are little more than provisional when we take into account the unreliability of the story's internal narrator, Mr X. Several clues suggest that the story may be no more than an extended joke on the theme of terrorism, such as his choice of dessert (*bombe glacée*) over which he tells the story, and his recollection that the name of the variety agent who occupied the first floor of the anarchists' base in Hermione Street was Bomm; the story concludes with a comment by the frame-narrator's friend that Mr X "likes to have his little joke sometimes" (102). Also, within his narrative, Mr X reveals himself to be a fabricator, staging the "theatrical *coup*" of a sham raid at Hermione Street in order to reveal the identity of the informer (89). More generally, this is insistently a story of

performances, and Sevrin is characterized as a performer as much as is Mr X and the Lady Amateur.[13] Echoing his skilful staging of the sham raid, Mr X tells us that Sevrin "was accustomed to arrange the last scene of his betrayals with a deep, subtle art which left his revolutionary reputation untouched" (93). Mr X introduces him as having "the air of a taciturn actor or of a fanatical priest" (85), and this combination of fanaticism and acting is repeated several times (93, 96): Sevrin's fanaticism associates him with the most extreme of the anarchists, and his acting with Mr X's own narratorial unreliability. Indeed, Mr X suggests that Sevrin's youthful, revolutionary fanaticism had simply been converted into fanatical anti-anarchism: "You have heard of converted atheists. These turn often into dangerous fanatics, but the soul remains the same" (100). According to Mr X, Sevrin remains a fanatic in his role as the "most persistent, the most dangerous, the craftiest, the most systematic of informers" (93). Sevrin's undoing comes when, distracted by his protective instincts towards the Lady Amateur during the sham raid, he ceases to play his role. Sevrin operates in a more elevated social layer than Lane or Marks and is not, as they are, associated with criminality. His role as informer means, however, that he is engaged in performing a fiction, as are in different ways Mr X in his manipulation of appearances and the Lady Amateur with her "gestures" of anarchism. Sevrin is morally, rather than criminally, compromised, and more subtly so than other fictional informers. The informer in this story is a performer – not, safely, on stage, but perilously – and absorbed by his own performance, he fails to read correctly the performances of others: "An actor in desperate earnest himself, he must have believed in the absolute value of conventional signs" (93). The paradoxical combination of acting, desperation, and earnestness

[13] For 'The Informer' as a story about performance, see Hampson (2005: 300-01) and Erdinast-Vulcan (1999: 119-27). As mentioned above (p. 25) Conrad preferred 'Gestures' for the story's title, telling Pinker that "you will see that title is the proper one as bearing not on the facts but on the moral satirical idea" (*CL*3 305).

makes Sevrin the embodiment of psychological opposites, from which he escapes by suicide, in contrast to Lane and Marks who are murdered. It is impossible to imagine such complexity in a novel by Le Queux, and while Wallace's novella lays bare the informer's dilemmas and his changing roles, it stops short of examining how he accommodates cognitively the resulting dissonances.

Conrad's presentation of complex and conflicting motives is also evident in *The Secret Agent*, emerging in the novel's handling of its source material, and the contemporary debate about the ethics of domestic espionage. Real informers like Le Caron saw themselves, like Verloc, as protecting society, life, and property, yet were seen by others as *agents provocateurs*; detectives variously saw informers as essential tools, necessary evils, nuisances, or as a menace to constitutional freedoms; systems of espionage, based on informers, were established by detectives and officials, but they carried the risk of employing *agents provocateurs*, including those operating on behalf of foreign powers. All of these issues are clearly on view in *The Secret Agent*, reflecting not only the terms of the debate but also, more widely, a public interest in and anxiety about informers and espionage. The Special Crimes Department is an arena of conflict between two different conceptions of professional ethics: Heat's approach – 'knowledge is power' – and the Assistant Commissioner's, which foregrounds 'the public interest'. The conflict between Heat and the Assistant Commissioner over Verloc's role as informer or *agent provocateur* reflects on the one hand public anxiety about informers, and on the other the insistence on the part of most professionals of their necessity. The Assistant Commissioner – in contrast with his historical analogue, Anderson – abhors the use of informers "in principle", whilst making an exception of Verloc's case, as he explains to Sir Ethelred:

> In principle, I should lay it down that the existence of secret agents should not be tolerated, as tending to augment the positive dangers of the evil against which they are used. That the spy will fabricate his information is a mere commonplace. But in the sphere of political and revolutionary action, relying partly on violence, the professional spy has every facility to fabricate the very facts themselves, and will spread the double evil of emulation in one direction, and of panic, hasty legislation, unreflecting hate, on the other. (*SA* 108)

The Assistant Commissioner justifies the exception on the grounds that Verloc's information will be used by the Special Crimes Department, and not by Heat privately. Heat defends not only the use of informers but also his secretive handling of Verloc's information. Challenged by the Assistant Commissioner on the propriety of maintaining both "private knowledge" and his "official position", Heat insists that the knowledge he derives from Verloc belongs to him, not the department: "I think it's quite proper. […] It's a private affair of my own. […] Private friendship, private information, private use of it – that's how I look upon it" (100). The Assistant Commissioner's rebuke to Heat is derived from Conrad's reading of Harcourt's "angry sally" with Anderson: "Your idea of secrecy seems to consist in keeping the chief of your department in the dark. That's stretching it perhaps a little too far, isn't it?" (103). Conrad however makes two important changes to his source material. Firstly, it is the Assistant Commissioner who rebukes Heat, rather than the Home Secretary rebuking the Assistant Commissioner. This shifts the scene from the realm of state politics to office politics, emphasizing Heat's extreme secretiveness and his jealousy.[14] Secondly,

[14] Such behaviour was, in fact, expressly forbidden in Vincent's *Police Code*, which acknowledged the need for the informer's identity to remain confidential – "There can rarely be occasion to divulge the name of an informant, and it should be kept secret, as far as possible, both in honour, and in the public interest" – but also required officers to communicate it within the chain of command: "Information must not be treasured up, until opportunity offers for action by the officer who obtains it, but should be promptly communicated to a superior, and those who are in a position to act upon it" (Vincent 1881: 202).

Heat's motive for his secretiveness is less principled than Anderson's: he is possessive, choosing to use Verloc's information for his own ends, rather than anxious, like Anderson, to protect his informer from exposure. Heat's motive is not, though, entirely impure: it springs not from "disloyalty" but from "that jealous mistrust which so often springs on the ground of perfect devotion, whether to women or to institutions" (74), and he believes he has "an authorized mission on this earth and the moral support of his kind" (77). His possessive claim on Verloc's information is partly based on the context – his expertise in "anarchist procedure" – that only he can bring. Employing this expertise, he has established a public reputation through the use or misuse of confidential information. He is "the principal subordinate of his department, whose name, printed sometimes in the papers, was familiar to the great public as that of one of its zealous and hard working protectors" (81). And reputation clearly matters to him: "His instinct of a successful man had taught him long ago that, as a general rule, a reputation is built on manner as much as on achievement" (69). The narrator adds: "His bodily vigour, his cool inflexible manner, his courage and his fairness, had secured for him much respect and some adulation in the sphere of his early successes" (75). Heat's revelation of the existence of an informer prompts the Assistant Commissioner's speculation that "the reputation of Chief Inspector Heat might possibly have been made in a great part by the Secret Agent Verloc" (102).[15] The novel's engagement in these issues is obvious, but it is its treatment of them that I wish to emphasize: instead of dramatizing a straightforward confrontation between domestic spymaster and elected representative, the novel deliberately complicates the issues by

[15] If Heat had indeed gained this public profile by passing information to the press, he would again have been in breach of the *Police Code*, which prohibited officers from giving "any information whatever to gentlemen connected with the press, relative to matters within police knowledge […] without express and special authority" (Vincent 1881: 253).

altering the roles and relationships of the protagonists so that their positions, and motivations, are less stark and more subtle.

Some of the same issues feature in popular fiction. Confidentiality in relation to informers, for example, is a theme of *The Four Just Men*: when Superintendent Falmouth threatens to expose Marks as an informer, Marks complains: "That's not playing the game, Mr Falmouth" (Wallace 1995: 112). Faced with a plot to assassinate the Foreign Secretary, in desperation Falmouth threatens to break the rule of confidentiality. Falmouth then fails to make adequate provision for the safety of Marks, who is as a result murdered. Meanwhile, the Four Just Men obtain confidential information on the "secret police arrangements" for the Foreign Secretary's protection, despite this being known only to four people amongst the authorities (97). The plot and counter-plot of Wallace's novella thus turn on the acquisition and protection of information. The informer, Marks, is one participant in the "game"; he trades in the desired commodity – information – but instead of receiving his promised rewards he pays with his life when his role becomes exposed.

The Secret Agent and a populist work such as *The Four Just Men* both, therefore, engage with similar, topical questions about the ethics of informers and information. What distinguishes them is the handling of character and motive. Falmouth's motivation for breaking the rules is clear: he knows he must prevent, above everything, the assassination of the Foreign Secretary. Heat's is more subtle and complex: he is jealously loyal to his institution, he distrusts his superior's motives, and he uses Verloc's information to maintain his reputation which is vital to his success as a detective. Furthermore, the novel's treatment of this theme extends its imagery: a striking image associated with the Assistant Commissioner provides a metaphorical analogue for Heat's hoarding of information. This image appears to derive from 'The

Detective in Real Life', an 1895 article by Arthur Griffths in the *Windsor Magazine*, written under the pseudonym 'Alfred Aylmer' and subsequently incorporated into his popular three-volume survey *Mysteries of Police and Crime* (1898).[16] The article draws attention to the connectedness of Anderson and his deputy Melville Macnaghten to the detectives in their department. Anderson "holds his whole department in the hollow of his hand; from his desk he can communicate with all its branches. The speaking tubes hang just behind his chair." Macnaghten "is in very close touch, too, with the personnel of the department" and his office is also "hung with speaking tubes, his table deep with reports and papers" (Griffiths 1898: 133-4). The Assistant Commissioner's office has the same furniture, but its atmosphere suggests not administrative efficiency but rather exotic menace: "He found him, pen in hand, bent over a great table bestrewn with papers, as if worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal. Speaking-tubes resembling snakes were tied by the heads to the back of the Assistant Commissioner's wooden armchair, and their gaping mouths seemed ready to bite his elbows" (*SA* 78). Far from being the master of his department, the occupant of this office seems threatened by the tools that are meant to connect him to his department's information. His isolation prevents him from carrying out real police work, so his detective instinct "fed, since it could not roam abroad, upon the human material which was brought to it in its official seclusion" (92); this metaphor for his practice of analysing his own officers' motives and actions reminds us of the imagery of cannibalism that accompanies Heat's viewing of Stevie's body (70). The Assistant Commissioner eats the human material with which his work brings him into contact and seems about to be eaten himself. The aesthetic effect of this

[16] This appeared in the same issue (Vol I May 1895) as Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt story, 'The Case of Laker, Absconded' to which 'Aylmer' refers in his article, showing the overt connection of facts and fiction in the magazine's engagement with the topic of detection.

passage, especially when compared with its possible source, reminds us of the richness and power of *The Secret Agent*'s imagery; such imagery is largely absent from populist treatments of the same themes.

Secret Agents and Secret Signs

Verloc's covert employment is not confined to his relationship with Chief Inspector Heat. Before we are even aware of this relationship, we discover that Verloc is a longstanding secret source of the Embassy in Chesham Square, having been recruited by the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim, former Ambassador in London and previously in Paris. Later, the narrator remarks that Verloc is "the obscure familiar of at least two Embassies" (41), indicating that he is working for a second foreign power.[17] Verloc's dual role as police informer and embassy spy fulfils another warning of those like Patrick McIntyre who argued that informers and secrecy were a threat to Britain's security, not a contribution to its protection. In his argument, McIntyre conflated British police informers with those working for foreign powers, suggesting that both were liable to act as *agents provocateurs*. In particular, the Autonomie Club was, he claimed, not only the target of domestic surveillance, but also the resort of spies "in the service and pay of Continental Governments" who comprised around a third of its members (7 April 1895: 6). *The Secret Agent* does more than endorse implicitly such condemnation of foreign systems of espionage; rather, as Coroneos has observed, "the narrative goes out of its way to secure justice" for Vladimir's transgressions, "producing a form of poetic justice apparently able to withstand the hard, disabusing ironies of the novel" (Coroneos 1994: 17). The Assistant Commissioner's victory over Mr Vladimir during the two men's walk from the house

[17] The narrator may also be referring to Verloc's work for Baron Stott-Wartenheim in Paris (22), but the phrasing is, I believe, more suggestive of Verloc working for two foreign powers.

of the "lady patroness" to the steps of the Explorers Club not only provides "poetic justice" for Mr Vladimir but also implies the triumph of a principle – that Britain should be free of agent provocateurs and their foreign spymasters. As the Assistant Commissioner makes clear during their confrontation, his objective is "the clearing out of this country of all the foreign political spies" (171).

Verloc's role as an agent of foreign powers situates the novel not only in the polemical frame – the political and ethical debate over espionage – but also in the literary frame of the emerging genre of espionage fiction. Whereas police informers were new to British fiction when Conrad began to use them from 1905-6, spies had a rather more established pedigree – indeed, some critics of the espionage genre have located its origin in classical epic, while others suggest the 'Newgate Novel' and Godwin's *Caleb Williams* as start-points.[18] Detective fiction and spy fiction both started to take on their familiar generic forms towards the end of the nineteenth century, and, while the two genres remained closely-related, it was in this period they began to become distinct (Denning 1987: 13-4, Symons 1974: 235). Detective stories could be identified not only by the presence of amateur or professional detectives, but also by a distinctive double-narrative structure: one narrative provides the description of the problem or mystery, the detective's acquisition and interpretation of clues, the solution of the problem and in most cases the exposure of a wrongdoer, and the second is a retelling of the mystery with the relevant facts supplied and correctly linked or interpreted.[19] The spy story frequently employs some of this structure but at its heart is a "mission", the word used in preference to "trade" by Mr X in 'The Informer' to describe Sevrin's employment (*SS* 96): the spy, whether professional or amateur, has a

[18] For a discussion of Book X of Homer's *Iliad* and Book IX of Virgil's *Aeneid* as spy fictions, see Merry, 1977, 25-29; Merry compares Verloc to Virgil's unsuccessful spies, Nisus and Euryalus.
[19] Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of this double-narrative structure (1971) is particularly influential.

task to accomplish or some peril will occur. The police informer and the spy are not always easy to distinguish, the former perhaps being more passive and the latter more active and often employed by a foreign power. Verloc clearly combines the two roles, but so in a sense does Sevrin: although not employed by a foreign power, his "mission" requires guarantees of safe passage from "high officials in various countries of Europe" (*SS* 96), indicating his involvement in international as well as domestic espionage.

The spy's mission is itself a secret and often requires the penetration of secrets held by others. Early espionage novels frequently announce this in their titles, so Conrad's novel would, potentially, have been read by contemporaries as an example of the genre. The first writer to be seen as primarily concerned with espionage was William Le Queux (Symons 1974: 235-36), whose titles include *A Secret Service: Being Strange Tales of a Nihilist* (1896), *A Secret Sin* (1897), *Of Royal Blood. A Story of the Secret Service* (1900), *The Seven Secrets* (1903), *Sealed Script And a Singular Secret* (1903), *Secrets of the Foreign Office* (1903) and *The Secret of the Square* (1907). His contemporary E. Phillips Oppenheim's novels include *Mr Marx's Secret* (1899) and *The Secret* (1908). This emphasis on secrecy demonstrates the narrative promise of these fictions: the reader is both indoctrinated into a clandestine world, and given the pleasure of seeing a mystery gradually or suddenly unravelled. It also suggests a fictional response to official and public concern about secrecy: the first Official Secrets Act of 1889, prompted by unauthorized disclosures of confidential information, including the sale of warship designs to a foreign power, "made it clear that there were important secrets affecting high matters of state and diplomacy which needed to be protected against foreign espionage" (Stafford 1981: 507). Even before this Act was replaced by a more stringent Act in 1911 following investigations into

German espionage by the Committee of Imperial Defence, official secrets were sufficiently interesting to the late Victorian and Edwardian public to feature in detective and even children's fiction, as well as espionage fiction, an effect of increasing rivalry between the great powers in military and diplomatic spheres: "The highly developed industrial countries were those with most inventions to uncover, and this was the primary reason why the spy story had its origins in Europe, and particularly in Britain" (Symons, 1974: 235). In Conan Doyle's 'The Naval Treaty' (1893), for example, the theft of a Foreign Office document occurs against a background of imperial rivalry with France and Russia, and Conan Doyle returned to diplomatic espionage in 1904 with 'The Second Stain', in which a letter from a "foreign potentate", whose contents could plunge Europe into war, is stolen from a senior minister's despatch box. The action of E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906) occurs after the children's father, an official, is arrested and prosecuted for "selling State secrets to the Russians" following the discovery of compromising "letters that convinced the jury that Father was guilty" (Nesbit 1995: 156). Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt investigated, in 'The Case of the Dixon Torpedo' (1894), the theft of a naval blueprint by a Russian criminal who plans to sell it to the Russian Embassy. Naval secrets were particularly at risk from the activities of spies in the period's detective and fiction, reflecting both Britain's historic strength as a naval power and its perceived vulnerability to naval attack in an era of an escalating, naval arms race. Clifford Ashdown's 'The Submarine Boat' (1903) has Romney Pringle, dining in London's Gerrard Street, overhearing arrangements for the handover of secret naval designs to a French military attaché, with the implication that espionage has become so common that it is possible to discover it simply by frequenting West End restaurants. Conan Doyle's 'The Bruce-Partington Plans' (1908) features the theft of plans for a

submarine from Woolwich Arsenal, obtained by the (presumably German) spy Oberstein from the suborned brother of a senior government official. One of the most notable examples of early espionage fiction, Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), purports to be a report by the young diplomat Carruthers on a German plan for a seaborne invasion of Britain, led by a disgraced former Royal Navy officer who has created a new identity as Dollmann, a German yachtsman. Although *The Secret Agent* is sometimes seen as an originator of espionage fiction, by 1907 spies had been infiltrating genre fiction for fifteen years.

These texts illustrate that espionage may be both a crime to be prevented or investigated, and a practice of modern statecraft. Writing about spies is culturally significant given the traditional hostility towards espionage in the context of both detectives and informers: if plain-clothes policing was problematic for an ideology that drew on the rhetoric of personal and political freedom, then spying was more so. Whether we see espionage fiction as a form of entertainment drawing its subject matter from contemporary anxieties, or as a means of legitimizing covert action by the state, its writers had to deal with the problem of presentation: how to make spies – at least those working for Britain – acceptable. Nomenclature provides some clues. David Stafford's analysis of Le Queux's and Oppenheim's fiction identifies "spy" as a pejorative term usually associated with the enemy and the more neutral "secret agent" as associated with British espionage. Stafford quotes Jack Jardine, the head of the British secret service in Le Queux's *The Man from Downing Street* (1904): "There is, I know, something repugnant to the British mind where the secret agent is concerned; but it must be remembered that England's enemies nowadays keep up a whole army of unscrupulous spies" (Stafford 1981: 507). Conrad's choice of "secret agent" to describe Verloc's role would, therefore, seem to acknowledge, ironically, the positive

(or at least non-pejorative) connotation of the term. However, Le Queux and Oppenheim are not quite as schematic, or consistent, as Stafford supposes. In fact, the terms "spy" and "secret agent" were used interchangeably to describe both British and enemy espionage, while only "*agent provocateur*" was reserved for foreigners. In Le Queux's *Whoso Findeth a Wife* (1897), for example, "spy" denotes treacherous Britons, notably the MP Andrew Beck, "the popular member of West Rutlandshire" who is also "a keen, cunning spy, […] in the pay of the Russian Government" (Le Queux 1897: 249). However, the phrase "secret agent" is used for Britain's agents working in foreign chanceries (79, 81) and also is used interchangeably with "spy" to denote the Tsar's agents in London (105). Similarly, in Le Queux's *England's Peril* (1899), "secret agent" denotes Irma Neele, recruited by the chief of the French Secret Service, Gaston La Touche, to provide intelligence on Britain's military capability, and the novel applies the same phrase several times to La Touche himself, as when the narrator describes him as "the most acute, adroit, and unscrupulous secret agent that his nation had ever possessed" (Le Queux 1899: 167). "Secret agent" also designates La Touche's British opponent, Saunderson (Le Queux 1899: 295). Significantly, La Touche is revealed as having "no equal, either in unscrupulousness or inventiveness […] and so eager to distinguish himself that there were times, in France, when he had actually acted as an *agent provocateur*", by, for example, fabricating evidence against a dockyard clerk suspected of passing secrets to England and Italy (97-98). At the same time, the French secret service are not above carrying out bomb outrages of their own, such as one in Paris designed to make France appear under greater threat than it actually was (143).

Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* demonstrates greater sensitivity to the moral connotations of "spy", despite appearing to take a similar ideological perspective to Le

Queux's. For example, in response to Carruthers's anxiety about "spying on a spy" (the renegade Dollmann), the amateur yachtsman Davies replies: "If he's in with Germany he's a traitor to us, and we as Englishmen have a right to expose him. If we can't do it without spying we've a right to spy, at our own risk" (Childers 1978: 107-08). Symons comments that this passage "is the first adumbration of the double standard by which They are viewed as spies pursuing evil ends, while We are agents countering their wicked designs with good ones of our own", thus solving "the moral problem involved in spying" (Symons 1974: 238). Indeed, Carruthers and Davies's mission begins on the assumption that Dollmann's plan is concerned with the naval defence of the German seaboard: they excuse their attempts at espionage by the fact that Dollmann is not only a renegade but also an attempted murderer who lured Davies into a potentially fatal manoeuvre in his yacht. As the truth about Germany's plans emerges, the "moral problem" of espionage falls away as Carruthers and Davies become defenders of Britain against invasion. However, before they achieve this knowledge, they have to solve the moral problem of "spying on [German] naval defences" by asserting a moral inferiority in their opponent, as Carruthers comments on Davies's position:

> It was not the morality of the course that bothered him. He was far too clear-headed to blink at the essential fact that at heart we were spies on a foreign power in time of peace, or to salve his conscience by specious distinctions as to our mode of operation. The foreign power to him was Dollmann, a traitor. There was his final justification, fearlessly adopted and held to the last. (Childers 1978: 278)

Whilst Childers's novel asserts, like many of Le Queux's, the rights of British amateur and professional agents to spy on foreign powers, there is a key difference between the

two authors' approaches in the depth of analysis applied to the ethics of espionage. Childers's novel examines the term "spy" and raises unsettling questions about the "dirty though necessary" activities they engage in (Childers 1978: 280), whereas Le Queux uses terms indiscriminately and does not pause to consider any ethical implications. While Childers's novel provides what might be seen as unsatisfactory answers, it does show the capacity for espionage fiction in the period to engage in difficult ethical questions.

The Secret Agent also pays close attention to the nomenclature of espionage. The epithet "secret agent" is applied nineteen times in the text: ironically by Vladimir to describe Verloc (26); by Verloc to describe himself as an agent of the police (48, 182, 187); twice by Heat in the context of an agent of a foreign power (101); by the Assistant Commissioner, once possibly ironically (102), and interchangeably with "spy" three times when addressing Sir Ethelred (108-10); and by the narrator both ironically (138, 175, 197, 215), and more neutrally (159, 179). Although the Assistant Commissioner uses "secret agent" interchangeably with "spy", Verloc prefers its more positive connotations, which the narrator exploits ironically, such as when Vladimir contrasts the reality of Verloc with "the invaluable secret agent Δ of Baron Stott-Wartenheim's dispatches" (215). "Spy" or "spies" appears seven times, always in the presence of the Assistant Commissioner, and always describing an agent of a foreign power (either Verloc specifically or foreign agents generally): Heat and the Assistant Commissioner both use the phrase "Embassy spy" (100); the Assistant Commissioner with Heat describes Verloc as "a spy in the pay of a foreign government" (103) and similarly with Sir Ethelred (109); he talks in general terms with Sir Ethelred about "the spy" or "these spies" as fabricators of both information and "the very facts themselves" (109); and he warns Vladimir of his plan for "the clearing out of this

country of all the foreign political spies, police, and that sort of – of – dogs" (171). "Informer", perhaps surprisingly given its position as the title of Conrad's preceding story, does not feature at all in *The Secret Agent*, although it later appears four times in *Under Western Eyes*. "Agent provocateur" appears three times, always in the presence of Vladimir. Vladimir uses it twice when chiding Verloc for his lack of action (25), and the Assistant Commissioner warns Vladimir: "All that's wanted now is to do away with the 'agent provocateur' to make everything safe" (172), implying that the epithet here relates to Vladimir rather than Verloc. *The Secret Agent*'s terminology of spying, therefore, varies with the narrative context and with the characters' points of view, and a comparison with the terminology of the period's espionage fiction shows a significant technical difference: Conrad's irony, applied especially to "secret agent", repeatedly deflates Verloc's self-aggrandising. This illustrates a major technical difference between Conrad's novel and the period's genre fiction, and also suggests an ideological position: the ironizing of "secret agent", the frequent use of the more pejorative "spy", and the avoidance of the more neutral "informer", negates any possibility of heroism on Verloc's part.

Furthermore, the use of "agent provocateur" by Vladimir to describe Verloc's role shows Conrad's novel engaging in a more fundamental and ethical criticism of espionage than may be found in the novels of Le Queux or in short stories by Conan Doyle. As we have seen, the informer's potential to create "the very facts themselves" was key to the arguments of those who opposed 'domestic espionage', and the currency of the debate was emphasized by Watt, who referred to the "years between the Greenwich explosion and the writing of the *The Secret Agent*" as being "the golden age of political agents provocateurs" (Watt 2000: 118). Vladimir's statement to Verloc – "You give yourself for an 'agent provocateur'" (25) – suggests that Verloc has, in

some way, accepted this role or described himself in this way. However, while he does not deny it, neither does he affirm it, and his response to Vladimir's charge that he has "done nothing" is to insist that he has "several times prevented" some (presumably violent) action. In this exchange, therefore, Verloc provides no evidence that he has indeed provoked "the very facts themselves"; at this point Verloc may indeed be no more than an informer, providing information for his paymasters to use to protect "the whole social order" (51) – and not an *agent provocateur*. The attempted attack on Greenwich Observatory could be seen as Verloc's first and only fabrication, driven by desperation, of "the very facts". However, evidence that Verloc is a career *agent provocateur* as well as an informer is provided by Verloc himself, shortly before his death. He tells Winnie: "There isn't a murdering plot for the last eleven years that I hadn't my finger in at the risk of my life" (180). Again, this could indicate that Verloc has only provided information that has prevented murder. But he goes on: "There's scores of these revolutionists I've sent off with their bombs in their blamed pockets, to get themselves caught on the frontier." The ironic use of "secret agent", together with the elision of informer, embassy spy and agent provocateur in Verloc's role, suggest that *The Secret Agent,* in apparent contrast with 'The Informer', offers a critical view of 'systems of espionage', with the implication that Britain could do without secret agents. Conrad's novel, then, exposes rather than solves the 'moral problem' of espionage.

Although agents of foreign powers such as Verloc are, unsurprisingly, usually cast as villains in espionage fiction, this does not prevent the genre from performing a cultural function of legitimizing espionage, at least when practised by the British. Some early examples of the genre are particularly overt in their ideological purpose. Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) is particularly notable, since it was prefaced

by a letter from Earl (Frederick) Roberts, the most lionized soldier of the age, calling for physical rearmament in the face of the threats dramatized in the novel: “The catastrophe that may happen if we still remain in our present state of unpreparedness is visibly and forcibly illustrated in Mr. Le Queux's new book which I recommend to the perusal of every one who has the welfare of the British Empire at heart” (Le Queux 1906: 4). Childers’s *The Riddle of the Sands* carries a preface, signed by “E.C.”, claiming that the events narrated in the novel are true and that its two heroes, using the pseudonyms of Carruthers and Davies, made their story public through Childers out of their concern that “the national security was really being neglected”. Part of this neglect, Childers suggests, is due to “the pitiful inadequacy” of Britain’s secret service, which is why the two amateurs had to take national security matters into their own hands (Childers 1978: 17-18). In addition, Childers’s postscript refers with relief to actual events including a new North Sea naval base and the establishment of a Committee of National Defence, while reporting anxiously that a “Voluntary Reserve” has been recommended but not established: “Is it not becoming patent that the time has come for training all Englishmen systematically for the sea or for the rifle?” (Childers 1978: 328). Effective espionage, physical rearmament, and mobilisation are, in Childers’s and Le Queux’s fictions, pressing necessities of the period, and both novels yoke narrative to explicit, polemical statements to make the point.

Although it works less overtly and in an imperial setting, the fictional text of the period that perhaps served to legitimize espionage more than any other was Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901). Like Childers’s and Le Queux’s novels, *Kim* seeks to legitimize British espionage by presenting it as a defensive operation, with British agents operating within and beyond India against subversive or invading threats: the great game “runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind” (Kipling 1987: 224). The

persistence of the phrase "the great game", popularized but not coined by Kipling in the novel, to describe the cold war between the empires of Britain and Russia in Central and South Asia is evidence of the enduring influence of the novel in how we think about espionage and empire in the period (Kipling 1987: 129 and n., Hopkirk 1990: 1). *Kim*'s more immediate purpose, however, was to provide a fictional model for a system of espionage that was designed to make spying appealing to its readers: espionage in this novel is sometimes literally as well as metaphorically a "game", as when Kim is put through observation and memory exercises in Lurgan Sahib's shop in Simla. Lurgan Sahib's character can be read variously as sinister, predatory, or nurturing, but the effect of this colourful episode is to impart glamour to the role of the spy. Conrad also identifies colonial espionage with game-playing in *The Secret Agent*, adding, as we would expect in this novel, an ironic tone that calls into question the moral positives assumed by Kipling. As noted earlier, the Assistant Commissioner "had been very successful in breaking up certain nefarious secret societies amongst the natives" in the "tropical colony" where his career had begun (79). His aversion to police work in London is contrasted with his enjoyment of the game-playing features of his experience of counter-insurgency overseas: "The Assistant Commissioner did not like his work at home. The police work he had been engaged on in a distant part of the globe had the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of an open-air sport" (89).

Kim was, in fact, taken seriously as a blueprint not only for espionage but also for a new education system more fitted to an era of great power rivalry, as is demonstrated by one of the period's most influential, and best-selling, books in any genre. Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908) appropriated Kipling's novel as a scouting text-book, making it the centre-piece of its 'Camp Fire Yarn No 1' to

illustrate "what a Boy Scout can do" (Baden-Powell 1908: 3-10).[20] Baden-Powell paid particular attention to Kim's training by Lurgan Sahib, "a dealer in old jewellery and curiosities, who, owing to his knowledge from dealing with natives, was also a member of the Government Intelligence Department." Baden-Powell added in parenthesis an instruction for scout-masters to "explain this", before concluding:

> This man, finding that Kim had such special knowledge of native habits and customs, saw that he would make a useful agent for Government Intelligence work, that is, a kind of detective among the natives. But, first of all, before employing him, he put him to one or two tests to see whether he was sufficiently brave and strong-minded. (Baden-Powell 1908: 8)

Lurgan Sahib's exercises to train Kim as a spy provided Baden-Powell with a useful game for the Boy Scouts to imitate. What is striking, though, is Baden-Powell's patient explanation of the governmental structures for espionage in British India: before the Boy Scouts learn anything about the rudiments of tracking, camping and survival, they are to be indoctrinated into the bureaucracy of Britain's intelligence establishment, in a tone that belies the controversies which, as we have seen, were a feature of cultural representations of spying. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell carefully associated intelligence work with mental and physical courage. It is also significant that the role of "agent" is described as resembling that of a detective: Baden-Powell invoked Sherlock Holmes, or advised scouts and scout-masters to read Conan Doyle's stories, five times (56, 58, 74, 77, 80-81).

The effect of these moral and cultural associations was to remove the pejorative baggage lumbering the British spy to make him admirable, attractive, and necessary to Britain's national interest. It is especially interesting that fiction was prayed in aid for

[20] *Scouting for Boys* was published in 33 consecutive editions by C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., between 1908 and 1961. It is estimated to have sold 100 million copies.

this ideological reorientation, suggesting that Kim and Sherlock Holmes had such a hold over the public imagination that they were seen as being worth appropriating; furthermore, by appropriating them, Baden-Powell helped to fix them more securely in the public imagination in a role allotted to them by imperialist ideology. In seeking to make espionage appealing to a young boy's imagination, Baden-Powell also emphasized the pleasures of intrigue, community, and exclusivity that came with membership of a secret society. Kim, says Baden-Powell,

> was made a member of the Secret Service, and was given a secret sign – namely, a badge to wear round his neck and a certain sentence to say, which, if said in a peculiar way, meant he was one of the service. Scouts generally have secret signs by which they can communicate with eath [*sic*] other.
> The members of the Intelligence Service are very numerous in India, and do not know each other by sight, so they have to have a secret sign by which they will recognise each other among other people who may be their enemies. (Baden-Powell 1908: 7)

Such "secret signs" are highly illustrative of the cultural representation of espionage in the period, combining the pleasures of game-playing with the serious purpose of what the Assistant Commissioner calls "irregular warfare", or countering espionage or terrorism.

While the emphasis of the early chapters of *Scouting for Boys* is on imperial adventures, there is also implied support for domestic systems of espionage: the skills taught by Baden-Powell's handbook were developed in South Africa but may be required at home, especially in the case of invasion (cf. Trotter 1993: 179). The link between the Boy Scout movement and espionage and 'invasion scare' literature was

certainly in the mind of P.G. Wodehouse at the time.[21] His 1909 comic novella *The Swoop!* is subtitled *How Clarence Saved England*: when nine foreign powers simultaneously and separately invade Britain, fourteen-year-old Clarence Chugwater rises to the defence of the nation as a Chief Scout, communicating with his network of school-age intelligence operatives by an elaborate system of secret signs which mocks the 'Woodcraft' chapter of Baden-Powell's text. By making a scout the saviour of Britain, Wodehouse's comic version of invasion-scare and espionage fiction seized on a significant feature of the genres that helps to explain not only why *Kim* lent itself so readily to Baden-Powell's purposes, but also why early espionage fiction often takes the form of the *bildungsroman*. Baden-Powell's appeal for physical, ideological, and moral training for British children was a response to his fears that the British Empire was in decline and approaching its fall as a result of moral, social, and physical degeneration (Baden-Powell 1908: 261-65). *Scouting for Boys* and Le Queux's jeremiads of invasion, defeat, and enemies within thus share the same diagnosis of Britain's vulnerability, and largely advocate the same cure: moral and physical rearmament, including the training and mobilisation of civilians (a measure that was also, as we have seen, advocated by Erskine Childers). As a result, the espionage *bildungsroman* presents the indoctrination of its hero into "secret signs" as a rite of passage. This is illustrated by Kim's progress from street-urchin to imperial agent. As Kim grows from child to man, the novel charts the claim upon him from three different value-systems: the Lama's mystical philosophy, British India's pedagogical system as represented by St. Xavier's, and imperial espionage. Kim's potential for the Great Game is first identified by Mahbub Ali, and his mission as an intelligence courier becomes a career once Creighton has glimpsed Kim's potential. As Kim's tasks

[21] I address the 'invasion scare' sub-genre more fully in Chapter 3 below.

become more challenging, the talent he displays becomes more evident, and he is gradually initiated into Creighton's secret service. The narrative presents Kim with a series of choices as to the correct path for his education: he rejects British India's formal pedagogical system and embraces both the Lama's quest and the Great Game for as long as he can pursue both in tandem. The crisis in Kim's development arises when he is faced with the challenge of saving the agent E.23 from his pursuers – another incident which receives special attention in Baden-Powell's summary (Baden-Powell 1908: 8-9). When his assistance to E.23 prompts a reprimand from the Lama (Kipling 1987: 209), Kim realizes that, finally, he must choose. While he continues to support the Lama where he can, there is no doubt about Kim's choice, as he makes clear to Hurree Babu immediately after the E.23 episode: "I hope to play the Great Game" (220).

E.23's codename is another of the "secret signs" into which Kim is indoctrinated by his recruitment into the Great Game: as Lurgan Sahib reveals, it is "a custom amongst us" to be designated by "only a number and a letter" (160). Prior to this indoctrination, "Kim did not suspect", says the narrator,

> that Mahbub Ali, known as one of the best horse-dealers in the Punjab, a wealthy and enterprising trader, whose caravans penetrated far and far into the Back of Beyond, was registered in one of the locked books of the Indian Survey Department as C.25.1B. Twice or thrice yearly C.25 would send in a little story, baldly told but most interesting, and generally – it was checked by the statements of R.17 and M.4 – quite true. It concerned all manner of out-of-the-way mountain principalities, explorers of nationalities other than English, and the gun-trade – was, in brief, a small portion of that vast mass of 'information received' on which the Indian Government acts. (21)

This 'system of espionage' is elaborate, comprehensive, and bureaucratic. The use of codes to designate sources of information serves, we can infer, to protect identities and also to provide a systematic framework for collating and assessing intelligence. It also, for the reader, provides an additional layer of intrigue. "The Game is so large that one sees but a little at a time", says Mahbub Ali (169), and the identities of the Indian Government's information sources remain, for the most part, secret. The reader is left both to speculate about who else might play this Game, and to admire the scale and complexity of the Empire's engagement in it.

These "secret signs", then, help to represent espionage as a glamorous profession that combines the pleasures of game-playing with a serious purpose. Moreover, espionage is more than a profession: it is emblematic of the practical and educative measures required to protect Britain's territory and even the moral integrity of its population. 'The Informer' and *The Secret Agent* also explore the values of "secret signs", and a comparison of Conrad's texts with *Kim* and Baden-Powell's reading of *Kim* is revealing. In 'The Informer', Sevrin has, like Kim, been given by his spymasters a secret sign, "a small square pocket of soft leather, which must have been hanging like a scapulary from his neck" (*SS* 95). It contains a "talisman": "a narrow strip of bluish paper […] signed by a very high personage, and stamped and countersigned by other high officials in various countries" (96). In keeping with the tone of this "Ironic Tale", Sevrin's "talisman" guarantees not Sevrin's protection – its purpose is, presumably, to enable Sevrin's safe-passage on missions overseas – but his ruin when he produces it to enable the men he believes to be police officers to recognize him as an agent. In this way, Conrad's short story inverts one of the tropes of espionage fiction. It also takes another – coded identities – and problematizes it by means of the story's strategy of narrative indeterminacy. The story's narrator is also

known only by a sign, "Mr X". The story plays with the genre trope by assigning the secret sign not to the secret agent, but to "a revolutionary writer whose savage irony has laid bare the rottenness of the most respectable institutions", and who combines this role with being "the active inspirer of secret societies, the mysterious unknown Number One of desperate conspiracies suspected and unsuspected, matured or baffled" (*SS* 74). He also has a third role, as "an enlightened connoisseur of bronzes and china" (74). Mr X is a focus of the story's carefully engineered indeterminacy – he is an unnamed, unreliable ironist, who fulfils overt and covert roles in the story, and who evades a fixed view of his moral position not least by misleading the frame narrator. The frame narrator fails to pick up the various clues suggesting that Mr X's story is not only *about* an elaborate deception, but also may *be* an elaborate deception, as is suggested by the story's final lines. The narrator, having been told "in a confidential tone" by his friend in Paris that Mr X "likes to have his little joke sometimes", ends the story confessing his own bewilderment: "I have been utterly unable to discover where in all this the joke comes in" (*SS* 102). The secret sign of Mr. X, therefore, signifies ultimately a shifting, ludic uncertainty.

The Secret Agent also works a secret sign into its narrative, where it supports not a narrative strategy of uncertainty, but an ironic treatment of Verloc's character. The covert symbol that signifies Verloc, "Δ", ("B" in the manuscript and "β" in the text serialized in *Ridgway's* Magazine), is suggestive of mystery and danger; both Vladimir and the narrator observe the ironic contrast of its suggestiveness with the actuality behind it.[22] The impressiveness of Verloc's information and the intrigue supplied by his coded designation are, for Vladimir, punctured by contact with reality:

[22] See Sherry (1971: 323) for his suggestion that Δ derives from Le Caron's information about the executive body of the Fenian group Clan-na-Gael: "they were known as the Triangle – a name taken from the Δ sign which was used by way of cypher signature on all documents coming from head-

> This was then the famous and trusty secret agent, so secret that he was never designated otherwise but by the symbol Δ. in the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim's official, semiofficial, and confidential correspondence; the celebrated agent Δ., whose warnings had the power to change the schemes and the dates of royal, imperial, grand ducal journeys, and sometimes caused them to be put off altogether! This fellow! (26)

Verloc's indolence, cowardice, and selfishness also contrast him with Kipling's shrewd and courageous secret agents, Mahbub Ali, E.23, and Hurree Babu. The latter's obesity belies his physical courage and endurance and provides an element of surprising colour to his characterisation, in contrast with Verloc's obesity which is both an index of his laziness and an example of the grotesque physicality that characterises the novel's anarchists.

The processes of recruitment, training, and indoctrination into secret signs in the espionage *bildundgsroman* generally apply only to heroes: the recruitment of villainous spies in the genre is usually a way out of a compromising situation rather than a rite of passage. For example, Von Beilstein in Le Queux's *The Great War of 1897* is an "adventurer", "gamester", thief and fraudster who is transported to Siberia after being arrested but within a year is in the Auvergne posing as an aristocrat, as the narrator explains:

> The Russian Government, when he was sentenced, were well aware of his perfect training as a cosmopolitan adventurer, of his acquaintance with persons of rank, and of his cool unscrupulousness. Hence it was that one night while on the march along the Great Post Road to that bourne whence few convicts

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quarters" (Le Caron 1892: 219-20). The editors of the Cambridge edition disagree: "the delta probably derives from forces internal to the novel. Throughout the manuscript the symbol is B. Conrad's change to the delta, or triangle, is thematic" (Harkness and Reid 1990: 417).

> return, it was hinted to him by the captain of Cossacks, that he might obtain his liberty, and a good income in addition, if he consented to become a secret agent of the Tsar.
>
> The authorities desired him to perform a special duty; would he consent? He could exchange a life of heavy toil in the Nertchinsk mines for one of comparative idleness and ease. The offer was tempting, and he accepted. (Le Queux 1894: 29-30)

More sympathetic spies in Le Queux's fiction have also made their choices under pressure – usually some form of blackmail. The "honest and high-minded" Irma Neele in *England's Peril,* for example, has been "compelled" by La Touche's "carefully-laid plans, to become a spy" (97). Other examples show an original act of treachery leading to a lucrative career for the villainous spy, such as Edgar Wallace's Lauder Bartholomew, the "mercenary of anarchism" (Wallace 1995: 136) in his sequel to *The Four Just Men*, *The Council of Justice* (1908). Bartholomew is a disgraced former cavalryman who covertly sold British Army stores to the enemy during the Boer War, and who joins the anarchist Red Hundred after a career as music-hall artist, newspaper editor, and racehorse owner. Suspecting "that there was a strong business end to terrorism", his greed motivates him to become a career spy: "There were grants for secret service work, and with his fertile imagination it was not difficult to find excuses and reasons for approaching the financial executive of the Red Hundred at frequent intervals" (Wallace 1995: 136). He is unconcerned about the "duplication of treachery" (145), entailed by his acceptance of a mission from the Just Men to spy on the Red Hundred whilst also being in the pay of M. Menshikoff, "right-hand man of the Grand Master of the Secret Police" (151). Bartholomew dies, like Verloc, from a knife to the chest, immediately after he had "realized vaguely that he was face to face with death" (154).

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad treats Verloc's recruitment by both the (Tsarist) secret service and the Metropolitan Police in retrospect and in fragments, but both recruitments are presumably the result of coercion, blackmail or financial need. The details we are given in Chapter II (the encounters with Wurmt and Vladimir) are entirely in accord with the spies created by Le Queux and Oppenheim: while serving in the French artillery, Verloc has stolen, and sold, a military secret, "the improved breech-block of their new field-gun" (21), an act of treachery on behalf of a *femme fatale* that initiates his career in espionage.[23] In Chapter VI, Heat recounts his identification of Verloc as Baron Stott-Wartenheim's source, and their subsequent deal whereby Heat offers Verloc the freedom to continue his "precarious trade" – in, we assume, pornography – undisturbed by the police in exchange for information (102). Like Le Queux's spies, Verloc has presumably been pressured into his espionage career, and like Lauder Bartholomew, Verloc has several masters, whom he exploits for financial gain. The similarities between Verloc and the villainous spies of genre fiction further confirm the novel's negative presentation of Verloc's espionage, whether on behalf of the Tsarist regime or the British police. The novel diverges from espionage fiction in one respect, however: the meeting between Conrad's spymaster and secret agent is the opposite of a recruitment, as Verloc is threatened with being "chucked" (27). This, of course, is key to the development of the novel's plot as it motivates Verloc to initiate the bombing at Greenwich Park. It is also a further illustration of *The Secret Agent*'s strategy of irony: in his role as villainous spy, Verloc's status confounds our expectations. The lazy and unvalued figure occupying a

[23] Verloc's original act of espionage is strikingly similar to an espionage coup carried off by one of Le Queux's heroes, Jack Jardine in *The Man from Downing Street* (1904), admired for "secretly obtaining a breech of the famous French Berthier rifle" (Le Queux 1904: 165).

position normally reserved in genre fiction for an active and shrewd one creates an ironic incongruity.

Conclusion: Under Western Eyes as Espionage *Bildungsroman*

As we have seen, the populist genres of detective and espionage fiction sought to legitimize domestic and international espionage as a necessary response to internal and external threats, and to do so had to challenge an established ideological and cultural distaste in Britain for such practices. The *bildungsroman* form lent itself to this cultural work as it could show characters such as Kim awakening to the need to act in the country's or the Empire's defence and developing the skills with which to do so. A related example is Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, which dramatizes the practical and moral development of its two heroes – the amateur yachtsman Davies who stumbles across the plot hatched by the villainous Dollmann and is nearly murdered as a result, and the diplomat Carruthers, who obeys Davies's call to help unravel the plot. The novel clearly charts Carruthers's development from dandified socialite, whose work for the Foreign Office is largely a distraction from the pursuit of society pleasures, to the amateur spy who saves his country from invasion. Carruthers's development occurs in stages. His expectation of a luxurious yachting holiday is confounded by Davies's craft, the *Dulcibella*, an uncomfortable but practical customized lifeboat: in adapting to its rigours, Carruthers learns the value of hard work, practical and systematic knowledge, and self-discipline. His realization that a plot against Britain is underway on the Frisian coast causes him to understand the importance of protecting the national self-interest that, implicitly, he had idly neglected in his diplomatic career. His discovery that Dollmann is a renegade, a disgraced former Royal Navy officer (who thus conforms to the genre's type of

villainous spy), causes a moral reawakening in which Carruthers comes to term with the legitimacy of espionage if the cause is just and the spy untainted by treachery or criminality. Davies, less obviously perhaps, also undergoes rites of passage, notably when he learns that his sailing expertise is necessary but not sufficient to defeat Dollmann. Carruthers's diplomatic skills are also required: his superiority in German enables him to understand overheard conversations, and his subtle management of conversations with Dollmann and the German naval officer Von Brüning elicits information and prevents exposure of knowledge, in contrast with Davies's social gaucheness that nearly causes their undoing. Davies comes to realize that national security is dependent upon intelligence, in every sense, not just practical knowledge and strength.

The Secret Agent does not display this characteristic element of the early espionage novel. However, the recruitment of Razumov by Mikulin in *Under Western Eyes* does suggest a resemblance with the genre that helps to illustrate why Conrad might have found informers and spies to be so resonant for his artistic and political purposes. Razumov's recruitment occupies two major sections of the novel – the final section of Part First and the first section of Part Fourth. Dividing the recruitment scene in this way introduces a significant element of uncertainty for the reader during the intervening Parts Second and Third in Geneva, as the narrator withholds confirmation that Razumov has been recruited or suborned. Textual evidence shows that Conrad chose to increase this uncertainty by striking from the manuscript of *Razumov* in these middle sections explicit references to his informer role (Carabine 1996: 185-86). The narrative strategy of indirectness is reflected, within the recruitment scene, by the indirectness of the narrator's commentary – his "strange reluctance to state baldly here what every reader has most likely already discovered himself" (*UWE* 293). As well as

marking a gulf between the sophistication of Conrad's narrative technique and, say, Le Queux's, this strategy serves to foreground Razumov's psychological reactions, conflicts, and development: the reader's uncertainty about Razumov's motivations prompts questioning of his actions.

Superficially, Razumov's interview in the General Secretariat and his subsequent instructions from Mikulin display the characteristics of espionage fiction. The spy's potential is explored and tested: Mikulin sees "great possibilities" in Razumov (307), and oversees his training in the skills required to be an effective spy. Later, in Geneva, Razumov is tested when his cover story is probed by several of the revolutionaries, Sophia Antonovna in particular. However, the genre model is deployed for a purpose. As Hampson (1992b: 168-91) has shown, *Under Western Eyes* follows its Dostoevskian model, *Crime and Punishment* (1866), by charting a psychological history in which two "radical discontinuities" – the murders of two women and Raskolnikov's mystical experience in *Crime and Punishment*, and Razumov's betrayal of Haldin and his confession in *Under Western Eyes* – create a pattern of false or conflicting identities leading to betrayal and self-reinvention. Hampson argues that both novels use genre models to trace their protagonist's psychological journeys – detective fiction in Dostoevsky and the Gothic in Conrad. While the Gothic imagery – phantoms, tempting devils, a "painted mummy" (215) etc. – is clearly present throughout *Under Western Eyes*, Hampson overlooks the novel's use of the espionage *bildungsroman* to provide an additional means of charting Razumov's psychological development.

Razumov is vulnerable to recruitment because of "his peculiar temperament, his unsettled mind and shaken conscience, a struggling in the toils of a false position" (307). Unlike the compromised criminals or blackmailed society ladies who spy in Le

Queux's fiction, Razumov chooses to give himself up to the "[e]xtraordinary occupation" of the spy (291), and we can construe several reasons for his choice. Firstly, it is an answer to the "moral loneliness" (307) which is emphasized at several key points in the text, including the opening of 'Part Fourth': "I should […] mention again that Mr Razumov's youth had no one in the world" (293). Mikulin supplies comradeship and understanding: Razumov "could not defend himself from fancying that Comrade Mikulin was, perhaps, the only man in the world able to understand his conduct […] Mikulin was the only person on earth with whom Razumov could talk" (297, 304). Secondly, espionage offers a surrogate for Razumov's thwarted academic and professional ambitions: Mikulin flatters Razumov's intelligence with his repeated references to "our greatest minds" (295); "in the moment of great moral loneliness", Razumov "was allowed to feel that he was an object of interest to a small group of people of high position"; and, although he does not know this, Prince K— presses Mikulin to "make a career for him afterwards" (307-08). Thirdly, there are hints of a revenge motive. In confessing to Natalia Haldin, Razumov says that before he met her he had "an inexhaustible fund of anger and hate" for her and her brother, "who had robbed me of my hard-working, purposeful existence" […] I had my security stolen from me, years of good work, my best hopes" (358-59). The psychological exploration of Razumov's character is sustained throughout the novel and culminates in his confessions at the novel's climax. These confessions demonstrate the impossibility of reconciling the spy's emotional needs with the need to perform a role, what Mr X in 'The Informer' describes as "the terrible exigencies of his part" (*SS* 104): the tension between the two needs causes Sevrin's accidental and Razumov's deliberate self-betrayals.

Razumov's choice of the "extraordinary occupation" has a proximate cause in his involvement by Haldin in revolutionary activities, but the narrative goes to some lengths to show it to be caused also by deep psychological and moral processes that have shaped Razumov's personality. Therefore, while *Under Western Eyes* obviously does not share the cultural function of an espionage novel like *The Riddle of the Sands*, it does share some aspects of form and treatment in its focus on the spy's moral and psychological development before and after his recruitment. By exploring the moral choices – Razumov's decisions, doubts, and self-justifications – with such psychological intensity, Conrad uses and at the same time transforms his generic model. *Under Western Eyes* also questions and complicates the *bildungsroman* form, both by dislocating its time-sequence, and by subverting the linear developmental process that is evident in *Kim* and *The Riddle of the Sands*. Razumov's development is not, like Carruthers's, from unconcerned naivety to wise seriousness. Instead, Razumov is increasingly exposed to the psychological pressure of a dual role, of revolutionary and informer, a pressure that ultimately causes him to confess his betrayal first to Natalia Haldin and then to the revolutionaries. Abandoning his informer role relieves the psychological pressure, and also, as Hampson (1992b: 190) has shown, enables him to "escape from solitude into community". The psychological and moral dissonance entailed by the role of informer or spy provides one explanation for why Conrad found this character type from detective and espionage fiction to be so productive. The informer or spy enacts paradoxes of performance and peril, of earnestness and betrayal, enabling a strategy of narrative uncertainty in 'The Informer', a sustained ironic treatment of Verloc in *The Secret Agent*, and an exploration of Razumov's psychological development in *Under Western Eyes*.

A second explanation is suggested by Mikulin's reflection on Razumov's utility to his own objectives: "It was as if the revolutionists themselves had put into his hand that tool so much finer than the common base instruments, so perfectly fitted, if only vested with sufficient credit, to penetrate into places inaccessible to common informers" (*UWE* 307). The informer's instrumental function is largely incidental in a work like *The Four Just Men*, but here it provides an opportunity for political as well as psychological analysis. In Part First of *Under Western Eyes* we see Razumov almost literally handed from Prince K– to General T– to Mikulin, as each realizes Razumov's utility in the battle between the revolutionaries and the regime, but only the spymaster has the positional power to exploit him fully. Conrad was not alone in recognizing the potential of espionage tropes to explore political themes: Hueffer's *The Fifth Queen* trilogy also exploits the informer character type to enable an examination of how political power is acquired, exploited, and lost. The trilogy has numerous informers, actual, potential, and presumed, who are used by others as instruments towards their own objectives. In *Privy Seal* (1907), Cromwell considers the utility of informers in exactly these terms:

> his whole life had been given to bringing together his machine of service. You might determine an alliance or a divorce between breath and breath; but the training of your instruments, the weeding out of them that had flaws in their fidelities; the exhibiting of a swift and awful vengeance upon mutineers – these were the things that called for thinking and long furrowing of brows. (Hueffer 1984: 374)

In Hueffer's and Conrad's novels, the instruments are shown to be fundamentally unreliable. Among Hueffer's informers are two, Throckmorton and Lascelles, trusted by their masters, Cromwell and Cranmer respectively, but who refuse to restrict

themselves to fulfilling purely instrumental roles, and develop an agency that determines events: Cromwell's downfall is engineered by Throckmorton, and Katharine's by Lascelles. This serves Hueffer's theme of the susceptibility of the apparently powerful to unrecognized and sometimes self-created forces.[24] *The Secret Agent* adopts a broadly similar position – Vladimir's commissioning of the Greenwich bombing leads not only to the destruction of the instruments (Stevie and ultimately Verloc) but also to Vladimir's exposure and expulsion – but *Under Western Eyes* as we have seen foregrounds Razumov's psychology over the political implications of his role. Razumov ultimately fails to fulfil his mission, but the consequence of this failure is his accommodation with society. This does not, of course, mean that political exploration is absent from *Under Western Eyes*. As I shall seek to demonstrate in the next chapter, both it and *The Secret Agent* examine how power is exercised nationally and internationally through the two characters who exploit Verloc and Razumov as instruments – the spymasters, Mr. Vladimir, and Councillor of State Gregory Matvieitch Mikulin.

[24] This theme is summed up in Katharine's speech to Henry at the end of *The Fifth Queen Crowned*: "Neither do you, as I had dreamed you did, rule in this your realm. For, even as a crow that just now I watched, you are blown hither and thither by every gust that blows" (Hueffer 1984: 588).

Chapter 3

"The Inciter Behind":

Spymasters

Introduction

The espionage sub-genre, which emerged in the late nineteenth century and became commercially successful in the Edwardian period, obviously required spies to populate its fictional landscape. In addition, the spy story often featured another character type, the spymaster who directs the espionage, and the fact that there are spymasters in *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* – Mr Vladimir and Gregory Matvieitch Mikulin respectively – is further evidence of the relationship between these novels and the espionage genre. In this chapter, I explore how the emergence of the genre reflected contemporary developments in international relations and domestic statecraft, which gave the espionage genre a topical and hence commercial value, and how the figure of the spymaster offered narrative possibilities – to thrill readers by purporting to offer insights into a hidden world of covert diplomacy and secret history. I also examine how the spymaster, like the informer, provided scope for political analysis, on an international scale rather than, as with the informer, a domestic one. The spymaster, therefore, appealed to Edwardian readers and novelists for commercial, historical, ideological, aesthetic, and technical reasons. I compare Vladimir and Mikulin with the spymasters of popular fiction, and with each other, to assess why Conrad chose to adopt and adapt the espionage sub-genre, how he responded to the same extrinsic factors that conditioned popular espionage novels, and what the

presentation of the spymasters tells us about the novels' ideological and aesthetic purposes.

Conrad and the Rise of Espionage Fiction

Conrad was aware of the commercial opportunities of espionage fiction, although, writing to *The Secret Agent*'s British publisher, Algernon Methuen, he disclaimed any suggestion of being motivated by them. The context for his letter to Methuen of 7 November 1906 was the marketing campaign mounted by the American weekly magazine *Ridgway's* which had begun publishing the serial version of *The Secret Agent* that Conrad had just completed, and which was substantially shorter than the volume eventually published by Methuen the following year (Harkness and Reid 1990: 268). *Ridgway's*, sub-titled 'A Militant Weekly for God and Country', was aimed at a mass audience but was not a "down-market" publication as has been asserted (Watts 1989: 103): the cover of its first issue proclaimed that it would carry "good fiction" as well as news sections informing Americans about what their government was doing in their interest. Nevertheless, its commercial orientation is obvious in its description of Conrad's novel, in an introductory passage heading its first instalment on 6 October 1906, as "a story of diplomatic intrigue and anarchist treachery" (12). In his letter to Methuen, Conrad appears resigned to, but says he disagrees with, *Ridgway's* marketing. He emphasizes instead the novel's application of a literary technique – irony – to what in other hands might be considered a populist subject:

> A piece of literary work may be defined in twenty ways. The people who are serializing *The Secret Agent* in the US now have found their own definition. They described it (on posters) as "A Tale of Diplomatic Intrigue and

> Anarchist Treachery". But they don't do it on my authority and that's all I care for.
>
> I could never have found that. I confess that in my eyes the story is a fairly successful (and sincere) piece of ironic treatment applied to a special subject – a sensational subject if one likes to call it so. (*CL*3 370-71)

Conrad articulates his own position here rather carefully. He disclaims the advertising tag for the serial as unauthorized, and then asserts the novel's technical merits – "successful" is clearly intended to mean aesthetic or technical rather than commercial success – with "sincere" invoking an ethical dimension to the novel's authorship that, presumably in his mind, sets it apart from more commercially opportunistic work by others. Indeed, Conrad here appears to be alluding approvingly to Henry James's essay 'The Art of Fiction' (1884), in which James identifies sincerity as "the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel" (H. James 1948: 22). An aspect of the novelist's craft that James examines particularly closely is the relationship between subject and treatment. James argues that the two cannot exist without each other, that to a great extent choice of subject determines whether we like or dislike a novel, but that "execution" is "the only point of a novel that is open to contention" (H. James 1948: 14). Those who prescribe or proscribe subjects are wrong to seek to constrain the novel: "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée*: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it" (H. James 1948: 14). James then elaborates a theory of the novel as an "organic whole", which, to be "successful", requires the "idea" (i.e. the subject) to permeate, penetrate, inform, and animate the whole, "so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression" (H. James 1948: 18). As James suggests, the novelist has the authority to choose any subject as long as it can be executed with sincerity: Conrad in this letter can be seen as asserting his authority to choose a "special subject". Sincerity,

then, for James and Conrad, is the novelist's seriousness in seeking to create a work that is artistically successful, whatever the choice of subject, and there is an implication in both James's essay and Conrad's letter that it is this quality that elevates a literary work above a commercial successful one.

However, perhaps mindful that Methuen had a commercial as well as artistic interest in his work, Conrad confirms that *Ridgway's* has not wilfully misrepresented his work: he admits the novel's subject (not only espionage and anarchism but also murder and suicide) is "sensational" as well as "special"; *Ridgway's* has, rather, chosen to emphasize the story's subject rather than its treatment. *Ridgway's* choice of "diplomatic intrigue" was clearly intended to position the serial for the magazine's readers in the espionage genre which, by 1906, had emerged from its origins in invasion-scare fiction and detective fiction as a genre or sub-genre in its own right. The former's origins can be traced back at least to the 1870s, but reached a height at the turn of the century with works by William Le Queux and others such as E. Philips Oppenheim and George Griffith, that asked its readers to imagine a Britain under military attack and foreign subjection. [1] Le Queux's first major invasion-scare novel, *The Great War in England in 1897* (serialized in 1893 and published in book form the following year), featuring the villainous German spy Von Beilstein, whose machinations inside Britain are designed to provide intelligence on its defences and weaken them, before and during a German onslaught. Le Queux effectively created the espionage genre in subsequent novels by retaining the spy but omitting the invasion. Critics and historians who have examined early-twentieth-century popular fiction have tended to concentrate on the extent to which it reflected the true threat posed to Britain

[1] George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*, first published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1871, is generally held to be the first work in the 'invasion scare' sub-genre. See Clarke (1995: 1).

by German agents. Stafford, for example, identifies Le Queux's "main importance as a spy novelist" as being in "popularizing the notion of a German spy menace in Britain and stirring up anti-German feeling" (Stafford 1989: 23-24). However, the so-called "spy fever" of 1908-1914 which Le Queux and his allies in the press, notably Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe), did much to encourage (Stafford 1989: 24), was a later phase of a cultural fascination with foreign spies that had grown in previous decades and was not exclusively focused on Germany, which became the principal menace in espionage fiction only after a major shift in international relationships. In 1904 the *Entente Cordiale* moved France from its traditional position in the pantheon of Britain's enemies to that of bulwark against Germany's growing military might, while Germany's traditional alliance with Russia provoked fears of an axis that could threaten not only the balance of power in Europe but also Britain's imperial interests in Asia (Stafford 1989: 23-24, 40). Until a similar entente was reached – the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, negotiated while Conrad was writing *The Secret Agent* – Russia in fiction and non-fiction was sometimes an enemy to Britain and often, as we shall see, an enemy to its own subjects.

Writers of detective fiction, meanwhile, saw opportunities to weave this shifting international diplomatic and military rivalry into the crime-and-detection plot by making the object of the crime a secret international treaty, a military strategy, or a technological design. An early Sherlock Holmes story, 'The Adventure of the Naval Treaty' (1893), published just before Le Queux's *The Great War of 1897*, not only illustrates this point but also can be seen to have initiated many of the tropes of later espionage fiction. The victim of the crime, Percy Phelps, is the nephew of a British Cabinet minister and an employee of the Foreign Office; the crime is the theft of the eponymous treaty from his office in Whitehall; the consequences, should the Treaty

fall into the hands of Russian or French diplomats, would be disastrous for Britain. The pattern of secret treaties, or naval or military designs, stolen by renegade Englishmen or by foreign agents, and then discovered by the hero's ingenuity, was reproduced again and again by Le Queux especially in a prolific series of novels, including *The Under-Secretary* (1902), *Secrets of the Foreign Office* (1903), and *The Man from Downing Street* (1904). The major change from Conan Doyle's precursor narrative was that the heroic protagonist was no longer a detective but a diplomat, shifting the hero's occupation from the realm of law enforcement to that of statecraft and foreign policy.

The result was massive commercial success for Le Queux and his rivals and imitators such as E. Philips Oppenheim. As Stafford notes,

> Queen Alexandra was reputedly so enamoured of his work that she had placed a standing order for all new Le Queux novels. If so, the royal library must have expanded quickly. By the time of Edward VII's death in 1910 Le Queux had written another forty volumes, and by the outbreak of war he had published another dozen on top of that. Practically all were reissued as cheap editions, and many appeared in translation" (Stafford 1989: 15).

Another historian notes that during the six years before the First World War,

> Britain was invaded by an army of fictional spies. They landed in their thousands on bookstalls and in bookshops. They used the short story to establish themselves in hundreds of newspapers and magazines, successfully infiltrating dozens of popular stage plays, and were even spotted in cinemas and on the pages of children's comics. (Hiley 1991: 55)

What explains the rapid emergence and commercial success of espionage fiction in the period from 1893 to 1914? Three reasons suggest themselves. Firstly,

contemporary political and geo-political pressures, specific to the period, created news that provided writers of fiction with subject matter that was topical, and that reflected cultural anxieties about Britain's moral and physical strength and its domestic and international security. Secondly, these historical circumstances and cultural perspectives created a need for patriotic reassurance that inspired writers like Le Queux to use fiction to perform ideological work, something that found favour not only with readers but also influential public figures and cultural arbiters such as Alfred Harmsworth, Robert Baden-Powell, and, as we have seen, the former Commander-in-Chief of the British Army and campaigner for rearmament, Earl Roberts. Thirdly, the genre offered significant narrative possibilities as it depended on intrigue in two senses: intrigue was its subject matter in the form of conspiracies and covert plans, and intrigue was the reaction that these fictions sought to stimulate in the reader. These novels had plots in a double sense.

Factors in the increasing geo-political tensions of the period, principally between Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, arose from technological development, rearmament, diplomatic rivalry in Europe, colonial competition in Asia and Africa, and the creation of a larger bureaucracy around foreign relations and military planning. The vast population of Russia, German industrialization, and colonial rivalry with France all created a sense that Britain's prosperity, its expanding Empire, and its peaceful relations with its European rivals were precarious and under constant threat. The topicality of espionage fiction is evident in the speed with which developments in international alliances and rivalries became incorporated into narrative. France, for example, was presented as an enemy in 'The Naval Treaty', the first of Le Queux's invasion-scare novels, *The Great War in England in 1897*, his espionage fictions *England's Peril*, *Of Royal Blood* and *Secrets of the Foreign Office*, and Oppenheim's

The Betrayal (1904). Kipling's *Kim* pits the British spymaster, Strickland, against Russian agents in a 'Great Game' narrative played out in the margins of British India. Once the *Entente Cordiale* was signed in 1904, the French disappeared from the pages of espionage and invasion-scare fiction, and the Anglo-Russian *Entente* of 1907, which brought to an end decades of imperial rivalry in Asia, similarly made works by Le Queux such as *The Czar's Spy* (1905) out-of-date. What followed was a dramatically increased focus on Germany, which "climaxed in 1908-09 during a national debate over the Anglo-German naval race, when public fears of German military might – stimulated by a vigorous campaign in the popular press – led to a flurry of reported sightings of spies" (Stafford 1989, 8).

The close relationship between fiction and the reporting of news is important: the fiction, like Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* (1906), was serialized in newspapers (in this case Harmsworth's *Daily Mail*) and borrowed from journalistic discourse a reportage style of narration, and the newspapers supplied context for the fiction's topical subject-matter. It is no coincidence that many writers of future war fiction were also journalists, such as George Griffith, Robert Cromie, F.T. Jane, Louis Tracy, and Le Queux himself (Clarke 1995: 21-2). Fact and fiction became mutually reinforcing when they combined to create a national panic over the threat of espionage: as Trotter remarks, when the *Weekly News* serialized Le Queux's *Spies for the Kaiser* in 1909, "the paper appointed a Spy Editor, and ran the headlines 'FOREIGN SPIES IN BRITAIN. / £10 Given For Information. / Have You Seen a Spy?' (Trotter 1991: 31).

Le Queux's relationship with Harmsworth illustrates that the co-dependence of fiction and journalism in invasion-scare literature also bears on the second reason for the genre's emergence – its capacity for ideological work. Le Queux dedicated *The Great War in England in 1897* "TO / MY FRIEND ALFRED CHARLES

HARMSWORTH / A GENEROUS EDITOR AND PATRIOTIC ENGLISHMAN" (Le Queux 1894: 4). Both men shared, along with Earl Roberts (dedicatee of *The Invasion of 1910*), a belief in the urgent necessity of moral, strategic, and military rearmament in the face of industrialized and hostile European rivals, and a sense of national decline that resulted in part from national shock at the inglorious outcome of Britain's 1899-1902 war in South Africa. Improving Britain's capacity for espionage and counter-espionage was a necessary element of maintaining British power and protecting against transnational threats. Quoting Le Queux's *Revelations of the Secret Service* (1911) – "many a time has secret information […] turned the tide of political events in Great Britain's favour" – Stafford argues:

> The belief that the intervention of secret agents was necessary for the tide of international affairs to flow in Britain's favour gives us the vital clue. For the appearance of the spy novel was inextricably linked with the crisis of confidence in British power and security that obsessed the Edwardian age. (Stafford 1989: 7)

Historians have also remarked on the coincidence of timing in the emergence in Britain of espionage fiction and bureaucratized intelligence organizations, culminating in the creation of the Secret Service Bureau in 1909: one factor that connected them was the climate of public concern which Le Queux's fiction as well as his freelance counter-intelligence work in the Home Counties helped to create, and which contributed to the arguments put forward to the British government for the creation of an espionage and counter-espionage department in the War Office. Although Britain's response was an official secret, Le Queux and other patriotically motivated cultural arbiters nevertheless took it upon themselves to legitimize espionage practices for the benefit of a reading public that might have been sceptical about the ethical case for

their use. Thus, Le Queux's Edwardian novels repetitively invoke patriotic arguments for "secret service", acknowledging that this may be seen as alien to Britain's liberal traditions.

Le Queux's novels address the patriotic concern that spying might be alien to British political, legal, and ethical traditions by asserting that, against the modern realities of British imperial commitments and threats from its European rivals, espionage is itself a patriotic duty. Le Queux's novel *Of Royal Blood* spells out on its first page the need to maintain British global power and protect against potentially belligerent rivals when the Marquess of Macclesfield – who is both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary – tells the diplomat-spy Philip Crawford, "It is imperative that active steps be taken to preserve England's supremacy, and at the same time frustrate this aggressive policy towards us which is undoubtedly growing" (Le Queux 1900: 1). Espionage is the instrument to achieve this objective: the Marquess of Macclesfield goes on to assert that "secret services must sometimes be performed […] The secret of England's greatness is her smart diplomacy" (Le Queux 1900: 3). Le Queux thus resorts to two potentially contradictory arguments: that espionage is merely diplomacy in secret (and therefore no departure from traditional, ethical statecraft), and that it is an underhand but a necessary response to the realities of geopolitical rivalry – the threat of war, invasion, or a loss of global influence. The first argument, which resembles Robert Baden-Powell's assertion that spying "is in reality reconnaissance in disguise" (Stafford 1989: 11), is offered by a British official in *Of Royal Blood*: "secret service" is "the very essence of diplomacy. The successful diplomat is the man who keeps his weather-eye constantly upon his opponents' doings, and presents elaborate reports to headquarters. Isn't every ambassador a spy, more or less?"' (Le Queux 1900: 12-13). Crawford, the diplomat-spy, elaborates: "The fact of being appointed on

secret service is, to the uninitiated, synonymous with being a spy; but in the world of diplomacy a man loses no dignity by seeking to serve his country by secret means" (Le Queux 1900: 99). He goes on immediately to deploy the second argument: "As in love and war, so also in diplomacy all means are fair to secure one's end" so that "the colossal armies and navies of Europe are prevented from coming into collision" (99). Another of Le Queux's heroes, Duckworth Drew in *Secrets of the Foreign Office*, goes further in acknowledging the necessity of covert methods:

> But active as are the agents of our enemies, so also are we active in the opposition camp. Our Empire has such tremendous responsibilities that we cannot now depend on mere birth, wealth and honest dealing, but must call in shrewdness, tact, subterfuge and the employment of secret agents in order to combat the plots of those ever seeking to accomplish England's overthrow. (Le Queux 1903a: 251)

Le Queux's way through this contradiction was to present the British protagonists as morally superior to their European counterparts: although the British spies resort to covert methods, the French, the Russians, and the Germans lack the guiding political and ethical framework that the well-bred Englishman is fortunate to have as his guide.

One such well-bred spy is Le Queux's Archie Cator in *The Under-Secretary*, ostensibly military attaché in the British Embassy in Rome, but "in reality the chief of the British Secret Service on the Continent," and a man "to whose marvellous tact, ready ingenuity, and careful methods of investigation, England was indebted for many of the diplomatic *coups* she had made during the past dozen years or so" (1902: 191). The novel's narrator makes explicit the necessity of overcoming cultural resistance to the practice of espionage: "Spying is against an Englishman's notion of fair-play, but to such an extent have the other great Powers carried the operation of their various

Intelligence Departments that to the Foreign Office the secret service has become a most necessary adjunct" (191). What makes espionage morally acceptable as well as a practical necessity are the personal qualities of its practitioners on the British side: there are stories "without number" of Cator's "prowess, of his absolute fearlessness, and of his marvellous ingenuity as a spy in the interests of his country"; as a diplomatist he is "smart, polished, courtly – the perfect model of all a British attaché should be", and as a spy, while he is "shrewd" and "crafty", he is also "possessed of a tact unequalled by any detective officer at Scotland Yard," has "a brain fertile in invention and subterfuge, and nerves of iron", and displays "untiring energy, skilful perception, and exhaustless ingenuity in worming out secrets" (192-94). By contrast, as will become clear, the foreign spy or spymaster is consistently portrayed as a villain, lacking the heroic qualities that ensure British espionage never descends into what Philip Crawford calls the "most questionable and unsavoury" practices of foreign spies (20).

Spies and, more particularly, spymasters provided writers with narrative possibilities. The spymaster is a 'secret agent' in a very special sense, whose primary narrative function is to initiate actions by others, whether agents and informers or unwitting participants. They assign the mission, or plan the stratagem or counter-stratagem. Their agency often initiates and always propels the action, as when "the Chief" in Le Queux's *Secrets of the Foreign Office* despatches Duckworth Drew to steal a secret rifle design ('The Secret of the Black Bag'), a secret design from a countess's corset ('The Secret of the Little Countess'), and a secret treaty from a safe in St. Petersburg ('The Secret of the Redwitz Plot'). On occasion an enemy spymaster, such as General Zouboff in 'The Secret of the Fox Hunter' in the same volume, will be found initiating events on the opposite side. The value of this character type is not,

however, merely functional: in order to direct his agents, and to stay ahead of his enemy, the spymaster concerns himself with knowledge – not like a detective, making inferences and deductions from the available clues to determine what has happened, but rather to calculate what might happen and ensure that it either does or does not occur. The spymaster therefore is privy to secret histories that explain what has really happened or might be about to happen. In 'The Secret of the Redwitz Plot', for example, Lord Macclesfield explains to Duckworth Drew that "the true state of affairs" in Britain's relationship with Russia is that a secret "*rapprochement*" with various guarantees and agreements has been negotiated, but must remain secret: "so anti-Russian was public opinion in England" that Lord Macclesfield "dared not, for the sake of his political party, broach the subject" (Le Queux 1903a: 96). Le Queux's narratives often take real events, such as the Fashoda Incident in Sudan in 1898 when Britain and France came close to war, and tell what purports to be the real story: 'The Secret of the Fashoda Settlement' reveals that France's diplomatic capitulation was the result of the Italian secret service deploying a new electric mine-destroyer against French naval defences, causing a shift in the European balance of power in Britain's favour (1903a: 157). The pleasure for the reader in these narratives lies partly in the sense of privilege from indoctrination into (albeit fictitious) secret histories which have such current and future significance; thus, to keep the reader's appetite whetted, Le Queux's narrators often allude to further tantalizing secrets just out of reach: "The reader would be amazed if he could but glance at a certain red-bound book, kept under lock and key at the Foreign Office, in which are registered the names, personal descriptions and other facts concerning all the known foreign spies living in London and in other towns in England" (1903a: 251).

For this reason, espionage fiction locates intrigue and excitement within what would otherwise be mundane offices: "There is more romance within a single Embassy than in all the fictions of the century" (Le Queux 1903a: 158). Indeed, the embassy takes on a particular significance in espionage fiction, not only as a repository of secret histories and plans, but also sometimes as a location of conflict and peril, being an outpost of one country within the geographical borders of another, potentially hostile one. It is an emblem of the genre's concern with international relationships rather than the domestic preoccupations of detective fiction. Le Queux's *Of Royal Blood*, for example, suggests that French and Russian "intrigue and mystery" in Brussels make the life of the British Ambassador "the reverse of tranquil, surrounded as he is by this veritable army of secret agents, intent upon combating British diplomacy and rendering it abortive, ever striving and ever struggling to serve their masters by prying into every secret in the Embassy archives" (Le Queux 1900: 200). Conversely, the embassies of hostile powers in Britain are sources of international threat in a domestic environment. Oppenheim's *The Mysterious Mr Sabin* (1898) sees great power rivalries played out on the streets of London as the German and Russian Ambassadors compete for the plans of Britain's coastal defences which Mr Sabin has covertly acquired. Chapter XI of Le Queux's *England's Peril* takes place in the French embassy in London, attached to which are "many spies, for of recent years the French Secret Service has grown almost as formidable in its proportions as that of Russia, and their constant reports from political and official centres in London would have surprised the Admiralty and War Office"; controlling them is a "renegade Englishman" reporting to Gaston La Touche, the head of the French Secret Service (1899: 105-06). *The Secret Agent* acknowledges this by locating the fateful interview of Verloc by Vladimir in the embassy in Chesham Square, while the Assistant Commissioner alludes to the

anomalous topography of embassies (physically located in the host country but "supposed to be part and parcel of the country to which they belong") when confronting Vladimir with his knowledge that the Greenwich bombing was planned overseas "[t]heoretically only, on foreign territory; abroad only by a fiction" (209). Such anomalies make them prime locations for intrigue.

Le Queux's La Touche exemplifies the qualities of the villainous Edwardian spymaster. This "prince of spies" (1899: 167) is brilliant, unscrupulous, and ingenious, qualities recognized by one of his agents, the beautiful but vulnerable Irma Neele, whom La Touche recruits to spy on her uncle Lord Arkholme of the War Office: "She hated this man La Touche, for she knew him to be the cleverest and most unscrupulous spy in France. As Chief of the Intelligence Department he had no equal, either in unscrupulousness or inventiveness" (1899: 97-98). He is not only unscrupulous (fabricating evidence against a dockyard clerk, as we have seen) but also unpatriotic and indiscriminate in his secret services, having participated in "half a dozen revolutions in the South American republics, sometimes fighting for the Government of the country and at others against it, yet always coming out scathless" (1899: 77); after he is dismissed by the French Intelligence Department, he returns to a former post as agent of the Russian police in Monte Carlo (238). La Touche is also "a born cosmopolitan" (167), operating effortlessly in London's Royal Geographical Society as well as Timbuktu, which, disguised as an Arab trader, he was the first white man to enter (75); his British counterpart, Saunderson, by contrast, is a "shabby little man" (284).

Foreign spymasters from detective fiction display many of La Touche's qualities, such as his cosmopolitanism and unscrupulousness. This is evident in the unnamed French diplomat in Clifford Ashdown's Romney Pringle story 'The

Submarine Boat' (1903), who buys British naval designs from a disaffected clerk: "Dressed in the choicest mode of Piccadilly, the Frenchman bore himself with all the intolerable self-consciousness of the boulevardier; but there was no trace of good-natured levity in the dark aquiline features, and the evil glint of the eyes recalled an operatic Mephistopheles" (Greene 1970: 170). B. Fletcher Robinson's 'The Story of Amaroff the Pole' features a Russian spymaster, Nicolin, who assists the professional detective Addington Peace in investigating the murder of the Polish Nihilist Amaroff. Of Nicolin, Peace comments, "I don't know a better man in his profession or one with fewer scruples", and Nicolin's unscrupulousness is confirmed when he is revealed as Amaroff 's murderer – "a scheme worthy of his most cunning brain" – in order to disrupt a plot by Amaroff to assassinate the Czar in Paris (Fletcher Robinson 1905: 19, 30).

"A Hyperborean swine"

The foreign spymaster of popular fiction, then, is characteristically a suave and sophisticated villain, socially accomplished and highly intelligent, outwardly displaying the habits of the highest social circles; this veneer however conceals a menacing intent, an alien origin, and an unscrupulous or even Mephistophelean cunning. He initiates actions covertly, often from an embassy that, by virtue of its location, carries risks of exposure as well as opportunities for espionage, and his agency sometimes extends to acting as a *provocateur*. It is not, then, difficult to identify Mr Vladimir in *The Secret Agent* as a version of this character type. Vladimir's elegance, skill in conversation, and elevated social connections are emphasized when he is introduced into the narrative in his dialogue with Verloc in Chapter II:

> Mr Vladimir, First Secretary, had a drawing room reputation as an agreeable and entertaining man. He was something of a favourite in society. His wit consisted in discovering droll connections between incongruous ideas; and when talking in that strain he sat well forward on his seat, with his left hand raised, as if exhibiting his funny demonstrations between the thumb and forefinger, while his round and clean-shaven face wore an expression of merry perplexity. (20-21)

Vladimir confirms his cosmopolitanism by asking Verloc if he understands French, switches at once to "idiomatic English" which he speaks "without the slightest trace of a foreign accent" (21), and makes allusions in Latin (24). His true nature is suggested by his bullying contempt towards Verloc, whom he berates for being "out of condition", lazy, and fat (22). The narrator nevertheless continues to construct Vladimir's "drawing-room" presence, increasingly in ironic counterpoint to what he actually says – which culminates in his instructions to Verloc to carry out a terrorist attack – and the arrogant, demeaning, and sarcastic manner in which he speaks. The narrator achieves this in part by focusing metonymically and synecdochically on his superficial elegance – his sock "of dark blue silk" (22), his face "clean-shaved and round, rosy about the gills", with "thin sensitive lips formed exactly for the utterance of those delicate witticisms which had made him such a favourite in the very highest society" (24). With a particularly Dickensian touch, the narrator then attributes an uncanny agency to Vladimir's "quaintly old-fashioned bow necktie": it "seemed to bristle with unspeakable menaces" (24). This use of metonymy to indicate the moral reality beneath the social veneer prepares us for Vladimir's sudden change of both tone and accent: "'Aha! You dare be impudent,' Mr Vladimir began, with an amazingly guttural intonation not only utterly un-English, but absolutely un-European, and startling even to Mr Verloc's experience of cosmopolitan slums" (24-25). The veneer

is momentarily removed, and Vladimir stands revealed as something alien to the clubs and drawing rooms he frequents, prompting Verloc to protest at Vladimir's "Hyperborean manners" (25), while he later describes Vladimir to Heat as a "Hyperborean swine" (160). The ironic counterpoint of this episode is finessed at the culmination of Vladimir's long speech explaining the perverted logic of his idea to attack the first meridian, when we are returned to a vision of Vladimir in society, only now with the certain knowledge of his unscrupulous cunning:

> Mr Vladimir exhibited his white teeth in a smile, with dimples on his round, full face posed with a complacent inclination above the bristling bow of his necktie. The favourite of intelligent society women had assumed his drawing-room attitude accompanying the delivery of delicate witticisms. Sitting well forward, his white hand upraised, he seemed to hold delicately between his thumb and forefinger the subtlety of his suggestion. (31)

The "drawing-room attitude" is only briefly held, as Vladimir's true character is again revealed: "The features of Mr Vladimir, so well known in the best society by their humorous urbanity, beamed with cynical selfsatisfaction, which would have astonished the intelligent women his wit entertained so exquisitely" (32). Later, Chapter X presents Vladimir in the drawing-room environment of the 'lady patroness' where he is confronted by the Assistant Commissioner. The ironic counterpoint of appearance and reality becomes visible in the contrasting attributes of Vladimir's face as he titillates a guest at the soirée with his views of the Greenwich Park bombing: "Mr Vladimir's rosy countenance was wreathed in smiles, because he was witty, but his eyes remained serious, like the eyes of a convinced man" (169).[2] The guest's comment – "'He has

[2] Haldin describes Mr De P– in *Under Western Eyes* as "a convinced man" (65), suggesting an association in Conrad's mind of Russian autocracy with ideological conviction.

been threatening society with all sorts of horrors'" (169) – is also ironic, as her words have an unintended meaning for both the Assistant Commissioner and the reader.

Two significant points emerge from these episodes. The first is the obvious one that Vladimir is revealed as "the inciter behind" the bombing (172), demonstrating the narrative utility of the spymaster, who often initiates the action. The second point is that the geographical attribution of Vladimir's accent and manners – 'Hyperborean' pertains to the most northerly latitudes – indicates not only the real nature of Vladimir's character but also the political and cultural values he represents. The foreign spymaster of popular fiction, consistently portrayed as a wolf in sheep's clothing, is appropriated in *The Secret Agent* to serve a purpose: that is, to exemplify a political system which adopts civilized, European trappings but is alien, uncivilized, and threatening.

The geopolitics of Vladimir's role and values are further and revealingly explored during his confrontation with the Assistant Commissioner in Chapter X. Vladimir asserts a European identity for the nation he represents: "My sentiments for my own country cannot be doubted; but I've always felt that we ought to be good Europeans besides – I mean governments and men". This appeal to European solidarity is immediately challenged by the Assistant Commissioner: "Yes […] Only you look at Europe from its other end" (172). The Assistant Commissioner's remark puts Vladimir's country in its place in several ways: it helps confirm its identity as Russia, it reminds Vladimir of its distance from Britain, and it locates it as peripheral to if not outside Europe. Vladimir's non-European origins are further confirmed when the Assistant Commissioner's revelation that he has interviewed Verloc causes Vladimir's European mask to slip once more: his intonation becomes "guttural" and he uses "somewhat Oriental phraseology" (171). Vladimir's geographical origin appears

therefore to shift from the northern latitudes implied by "Hyperborean" to the east, an association previously suggested by Sir Ethelred's complaint of foreign powers "importing their methods of Crim-Tartary" (i.e. the Crimea) into Britain (107).

The novel's construction of a non-European 'other' that is obviously Tsarist Russia serves an ideological purpose that is both more subtle, and more pointed, than what we would normally expect to find in the period's espionage fiction. We have seen that Britain's enemies (variously France, Germany, and Russia) were presented to the Edwardian reader through the emblematic figure of the foreign spymaster in order to legitimize British diplomatic and espionage practices while patriotically asserting Britain's moral superiority. The important characteristic of the foreign spymaster is simply that he is foreign. Although, as we shall see, there are some specific and significant assumptions about Russian statecraft and national character in the period's espionage fiction, in general the spymaster represents the villainy of a geopolitical enemy, and the choice of enemy was determined by rivalries and alliances rather than any fundamental ideology. In the case of *The Secret Agent*, it is clear, even without recourse to our biographical knowledge of Conrad's family's history of opposition to and punishment by Tsarist occupiers in eastern Poland, that Vladimir represents aspects of the Russian state and its people, and that Conrad uses Vladimir to analyse these national characteristics.

Vladimir enables this political analysis because he is both figuratively and literally a representative of the Russian state. His overt, diplomatic role as First Secretary requires him to express and promote his government's policy, as he does in the lady patroness's drawing room by urging, among the presumably influential fellow guests, the global suppression of revolutionaries. This diplomatic role also requires him to maintain his 'European' facade of civilized values, respect for legality, and

social manners. His role as spymaster, however – representing the Russian government covertly – shows the ruthless, violent, devious, cruel, and uncivilized reality, as in Chapter II when he instructs Verloc to carry out an attack that has "all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy" (31) and which is, in reality, a covert means of furthering his government's policy. The novel is clearly saying, then, that Russia's constructed image of civilized Europeanism is a veneer, as much of a "sham" as, in the Assistant Commissioner's diagnosis, is the Greenwich outrage itself (172). Vladimir is thus a figure in an "embedded allegory of national interests" (GoGwilt 1995:178-79). Vladimir's emblematic function therefore enables the novel to construct a political identity for Russia as an international deception, apt to fool European observers into thinking that it too is European and constructed on civilized, Western or European values, whereas the reality is that it exists outside Europe geographically, and morally it is Eastern or Oriental in the most pejorative sense.[3]

We might assume that the political implications of Vladimir's character distinguish Conrad's novel from the more populist works of writers such as Le Queux that provided prototypes for Vladimir. If so, then we might be surprised to find that a similar view of Russian political and social values was fairly widespread in the period's literature, including populist genres. For example, two novels by Le Queux that shortly pre-dated *The Secret Agent* represent the Russian state as totalitarian, cruel, and alien; like *The Secret Agent* both novels focused that representation through Russian spymasters. In *The Man from Downing Street* (1904), the British agent Jack Jardine is despatched on a hazardous mission to St. Petersburg: "The agents of police

[3] GoGwilt (1995: 27) argues that a 'Western' political and cultural identity constructed between 1880 and 1920, and Conrad's struggles to repudiate the label of 'Slav', illustrate "the increasingly important distinction between Russia and the West that came to dominate political, cultural, and historical articulation of the East-West division". GoGwilt usefully amplifies his argument with an analysis of 'Autocracy and War', to which my own reading of the essay is indebted.

are everywhere in Russia, and many a foreign secret agent is at this moment languishing in the Fortress of Peter and Paul or in that most dreaded of all prisons in the world, Schlusselburg" (Le Queux 1904: 241-42). Jardine's fears are realized: he is arrested and sent to "the chief bureau of Secret Police, the dreaded Third Section of which one has heard so much from time to time", and "through which thousands of unfortunate political suspects have passed on the first stage of their long journey to that land of no return – Siberia" (Le Queux 1904: 264-65).[4] The Russian system of espionage is controlled by "the keen but unscrupulous" General Khostoff – "stout, round-faced, grey-bearded, [...] [s]tern, brusque, with a sharp penetrating eye" – and what is significant here is that Khostoff's operations are international: "From that office spread a network of surveillance, the most far-reaching and the most ingenious of modern times. In every capital, almost in every one of the principal cities in the civilized world today may be found one or more agents of that wonderful organisation" (Le Queux 1904: 267). The suggestion that "the civilized world" is being spied upon by an anxious, paranoid Russian state reinforces the political and cultural gulf between the two.

Le Queux's subsequent novel, *The Czar's Spy*, owes a great deal to the events and preoccupations of the immediate period of its writing, as the example of the 1905 Russian Revolution is evident in the inclusion in the narrative of references to Vyacheslav de Plehve – Russian Minister of the Interior who had been assassinated on the orders of the double-agent Eugene Azeff in 1904 and was the model for Mr de P— in *Under Western Eyes* – and a revolutionary leader, Otto Kampf, known as 'The Red Priest', who is evidently based on one of the Revolution's ringleaders, Father George

[4] The 'Third Section' of the Russian Imperial Chancellery was its secret service, replaced in 1880 by the Okhrana. Nevertheless, "Third Section" remained a favoured label for Russia's espionage organization in the Edwardian period, as this and other examples quoted in this chapter demonstrate.

Gapon (Le Queux 1905: 354, 376-77).[5] The spy – or spymaster – of the title is Baron Xavier Oberg, the tyrannical governor of Finland and architect of its "disastrous […] Russification": "The Russian bureaucracy was trying to destroy its weaker but more successful neighbour, and in order to do so employed the harshest and most unscrupulous officials it could import" (Le Queux 1905: 199). Oberg is both an occupier and a member of the Tsar's secret service, so Finland has thus become a police state in which "Russian agents abound everywhere […] reporting conspiracies that do not exist and denouncing the innocent as 'politicals'" (285-86). The fate of one of Oberg's victims, the mother of the novel's heroine, might have had particular resonance for Conrad, as it mirrors his parent's exile to Vologda in northern Russia, described by his father Apollo Korzeniowski as a "huge quagmire" with only two seasons, "white winter and green winter" (Najder 1983: 17): denounced by Oberg to de Plehve, "she had been exiled to one of those dreaded Arctic settlements beyond Yakutsk, a place where it is almost eternal winter, and where the conditions of life are such that half the convicts are insane" (Le Queux 1905: 376-77). Like Vladimir, Oberg functions as an emblem of a political system, although what distinguishes Oberg is the congruence of appearance and reality. No-one could doubt Oberg's villainy from his appearance:

> I then saw that his bony face, with high cheek-bones, slight grey side-whiskers, hard mouth and black eyes set closely together, was one that bore the mark of evil upon it – the keen, sinister countenance of one who could act without any compunction and without regret. Truly one would not be surprised at any cruel, dastardly action of a man with such a face – the face of an oppressor. (Le Queux 1905: 267)

[5] See pp. 188-91 below for the significance of Azeff and Gapon to *Under Western Eyes*.

Arthur and Mary Ropes's *On Peter's Island* (1901), a political melodrama set in St. Petersburg, also features a spymaster who portrays emblematically, and negatively, the Russian system. Like Oberg, Major Simeon Simeonovitch Golovkin of the Third Section cannot conceal his villainy: "he is just like a hawk, eyes and beak and everything ready to pounce on you" (Ropes and Ropes 1901: 7). Although he is also associated metaphorically with a non-European cultural identity – he "appreciated good tobacco with Oriental completeness of enjoyment" (10) – he represents not, like Vladimir, Russia's international presence, but its domestic tyranny: "To one who knows the enormous power of the vast and complicated Russian official machine, its smallest outlying cogwheel is an object of respect" (9-10). Golovkin is a more sophisticated character than Le Queux's Oberg in that he is able to understand the reality of Russia's security apparatus, rather than being merely its unthinking servant, and the Ropes' novel thereby enables a deeper analysis of Russian autocracy than Le Queux's. Golovkin comments to one of the (European) heroes of the novel that "you are accustomed to hear ignorant people say that our police knows everything. That, of course, is not the fact. We never know the one thing essential about the one important man; but we have accumulated an enormous stock of totally useless facts about more or less unimportant persons" (Ropes and Ropes 1901: 11). He illustrates his rather cynical view with an anecdote about seeing a female "political prisoner" during a visit to a prison whom he discovers was arrested by an accident, and had remained in prison for two years: "She will be released in a month or two. That is rather indecent haste, but the authorities kindly stretched a point for me" (12). The victim in *The Czar's Spy* is the deliberate target of individual villainy unscrupulously using the instruments of state power to achieve personal objectives; here, however, autocracy and arbitrary

punishment is systemic and the product of an uncontrollable bureaucratic machine that has exceeded the power of the human beings who administer it.

A characterization of Russia as systematically arbitrary, and omnivorously consuming information on its own subjects, is common in Edwardian popular fiction. De Plehve, for example, appears as a character in A.C. Fox-Davies's detective novel *The Mauleverer Murders* (1907), and his alien villainy is signalled by his appearance and behaviour. When asked by the amateur detective Dennis Yardley whether a suspect in the case was one of de Plehve's secret agents, "a curious animal expression, half leer, half cunning, overspread his coarse features" (Fox-Davies 1907: 155). De Plehve goes on to explain unashamedly the arbitrary nature of Russian justice:

> 'In this country we are not given to splitting hairs over legal technicalities. If it is for the good of the State that a man should be executed or transported, well, he is' – cynically commented the Minister – 'and we don't trouble much whether his crime be murder or manslaughter. Your wonderful English law is different'. (Fox-Davies 1907: 167)

Representations of Russian politics and culture as alien, arbitrary and autocratic, sometimes deceptively adopting European camouflage, were not confined to the Edwardian decade. A notable example is Kipling's short story 'The Man Who Was', included in the collection *Life's Handicap* (1891), in which Russia's geographical position is crucial to the story's purpose, as its narrator, dining in an officer's mess in the North West Frontier, immediately reveals:

> Let it be clearly understood that the Russian is a delightful person till he tucks in his shirt. As an Oriental he is charming. It is only when he insists upon being treated as the most easterly of western peoples instead of the most westerly of easterns that he becomes a racial anomaly extremely difficult to handle. The

> host never knows which side of his nature is going to turn up next. (Kipling 1987: 97)

There are, needless to say, some very broad and stereotypical assumptions here, all pointing towards an essentializing of the Russian character: we can read the connotations of "Oriental" as exotic and cruel, while the geopolitical threat here is made oblique by its ironic diminution into a trifling inconvenience. The irony is brought out by two unexpected arrivals in the mess. The first is a Russian, Dirkovitch, "a handsome young Oriental" (97) whose vague description of his route to British India suggests he is in fact on a Great Game espionage mission, like the two Russians in *Kim*. The second arrival is Limmason, a broken-down former member of the regiment whose treatment after capture by the Russians many years previously has traumatized his body and mind to the point that only his instincts remain. He has located the mess by instinct, he instinctively follows its rituals, and, having been conditioned by imprisonment and exile (as a result of an undisclosed "accident") in three locations in Siberia, instinctively fears and obeys Dirkovitch, who is now denoted ironically as an "affable Oriental" (107): he "cringed before Dirkovitch as instinctively as he had pressed the spring of the candlestick, sought the picture of the drum-horse, and answered to the toast of the Queen" (108). The two interruptions of the mess dinner reveal the ironic point of the story: the first, by Dirkovitch, appears to illustrate the narrator's assertion that Russia's difference (as a "racial anomaly") is merely a question of manners, but the second interruption, by a victim of Russia's "Oriental" political system, reveals the irony of that assertion and the horror of the reality. The story's message and ironic technique are, then, similar to *The Secret Agent*'s: Dirkovitch's incongruity is a warning of Russia's political and moral threat.

Another incongruous Russian links Kipling's text to the historical events that strongly influenced Edwardian representations of Russian autocracy. In E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, Peter recalls Kipling's story when confronted by the baffling presence at the railway station of a terrified foreigner: "'He's Russian,' cried Peter, 'or else he's like "the man who was" – in Kipling, you know'" (Nesbit 1995: 243). The presence of the Russian – the dissident writer Sherpansky – prompts Peter to recall Kipling's text that similarly presents the Russian state as arbitrary and cruel. For Nesbit, an admirer of Russian dissident exiles including Sergei Kravchinsky ('Stepniak') upon whom she based Sherpansky (Briggs 1987: 75), Russia's autocracy had been exposed by its treatment of oppositionists; in the novel, Sherpansky is sentenced to hard labour in a Siberian mine, and whipped in a chain-gang.[6] Nesbit can therefore be seen capitalizing on the topicality of Russian politics in the wake of its defeat in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War, alluded to several times in her text (Nesbit 1995: 79-80), and the 1905 Russian Revolution; her novel suggests a linkage between its political system on the one hand and its geopolitical and internal instability on the other, recognition of which introduced "a new stage of political consciousness" in Edwardian Britain by shaking imperialist assumptions of Great Power stability (GoGwilt 1995: 28). This linkage is evident in Conrad's essay 'Autocracy and War' (1905), a key text for understanding Conrad's perception of Russian statecraft.[7]

Conrad addresses the War and the Revolution together in a complex passage which alludes to "blood freezing crimson upon the snow of the squares and streets of St. Petersburg" and likens the war to "the explosive ferment of a moral grave" which may create "a new political organism to take the place of a gigantic and dreaded phantom" (*NLL* 73-74). The essay's optimism that Russia may be on the verge of a

[6] For Stepniak, see pp. 202-03 below.
[7] Carabine (1996: 84-91) has a particularly insightful discussion of the essay and Conrad's political thinking.

political and social transformation as a result of the bloodshed in St. Petersburg and Manchuria is, however, fleeting: the essay is weighted with rhetoric and imagery that constructs an alien and monstrous Russia. The phantom overshadowing both Europe and its own people is one of many gothic images that serve to represent Russia as an alien other. What might appear to be a gratuitous use of such imagery is, on a closer view, integral to the essay's argument, as the "phantom", "ghost", or "apparition" of Russian power is simultaneously horrifying and insubstantial: military defeat in Manchuria has shown the reality of military impotence behind a facade that has deceived "the writers of sensational paragraphs" who have failed to perceive what, in the previous century, Bismarck correctly labelled the "Néant" (79). Russia is nothing more than "a fantasy of a madman's brain" which "could in reality be nothing else than a figure out of a nightmare seated upon a monument of fear and oppression. […] Spectral it lived and spectral it disappears […]. What is amazing is the myth of its irresistible strength, which is dying so hard" (77).[8]

Russia's military weakness invites the question of what kind of threat she poses. The essay does not pose, or answer, this question explicitly, but the answer is implicit in a sequence initiated by a series of allusions to Arabian folklore, that, like the earlier gothic imagery, serves to position Russia outside European norms geographically and culturally. The "dreaded and strange apparition" of Russia is "something not of this world, partaking of a ravenous Ghoul, of a blind Djinn grown up from a cloud, and of the Old Man of the Sea" (75).[9] Even Russia's destruction is orientialized: the "phantom" is "disappearing", "as if by a touch of that wonderful magic for which the East has always been famous" (79). However, this rhetorical

[8] Darvay (1999) offers an ingenious reading of Conrad's gothic imagery and tropes, in *Under Western Eyes* and 'Autocracy and War', as being evidence of an appropriation of the conventions of espionage fiction which, he argues, was itself a development of late eighteenth-century gothic fiction.
[9] All three figures are an allusion to *One Thousand and One Nights*: see *NLL* n., 414.

position proves to be unstable, as the argument shifts to locate Russia outside the pale even of the Orient, in which autocracy was combined with magnificence:

> And neither has it been Asiatic in its nature. Oriental despotisms belong to the history of mankind; they have left their trace on our minds and imagination by their splendour, by their culture, by their art, by the exploits of great conquerors. The record of their rise and decay has an intellectual value; they are in their origins and their course the manifestations of human needs, the instruments of racial temperament, of catastrophic force, of faith and fanaticism. […] It is impossible to assign to it any rational origin in the vices, the misfortunes, the necessities or the aspirations of mankind. This despotism has neither an European nor an Oriental parentage. (81)

Russia then is neither Eastern nor Western, as it has none of the virtues of either: "It is a visitation, like a curse from heaven falling in the darkness of ages upon the plains of forest and steppe lying dumbly on the confines of two continents: a true desert harbouring no Spirit either of the East or of the West" (82). This is what makes Russia "as a nation so difficult to understand by Europe": it is so alien, inhumane, that it is beyond our understanding, so to rationalize it we deceive ourselves into thinking it must be of a European or an Asian character. It is this thought that causes the essay to change rhetorical tack yet again, dismissing its earlier assertion that Russia is a "Néant" as being too abstractly grand:

> She is not an empty void, she is a yawning chasm between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience. Those that have peered into that abyss where the dreams of panslavism, of universal

> conquest, mingles with the hate and contempt for Western ideas drift impotently like shapes of mist, know well that it is bottomless. (83)[10]

GoGwilt (1995: 33) remarks that "nihilism, in the full complexity of its cultural, philosophical, and political resonances, lies behind Conrad's discussion of Russia as 'Le Néant'. What is clear from this passage, however, is that the essay's conclusion is more extreme and disturbing than GoGwilt suggests: Russia – by which we assume Conrad means its people, its social organisation, and its 'national character', as well as its regime – negates every aspect of the values and virtues that make up not merely the European, but the human. This then is Conrad's answer to what nature of threat Russia poses: it is a moral threat not just to Western civilization but to humanity.

"Not quite as black as he used to be painted"

In January 1910, Conrad asked Pinker's advice on '*Under Western Eyes*' as a title to supersede *Razumov*, disclaiming any strong feelings on the matter: "A title pertains to the publishing part of the business" (*CL*4 319). Nevertheless, the new title indicates both the technical and ideological orientation of the novel. Its narration by a "dense westerner" (*UWE* 105), who repeatedly and often by his own admission fails to understand the phenomena he is observing, dramatizes the gulf in perception between Russia and the West that Conrad had diagnosed in 'Autocracy and War'. The title is also thematically significant in drawing attention to the novel's insistent imagery of eyes, sight and blindness, and ways of seeing or not seeing. An aspect of this that is particularly germane to a consideration of *Under Western Eyes* as an espionage novel

[10] Andrzej Busza (1976: 108-09), in a persuasive analysis of the essay, notes that its "hesitation between horror and ridicule is characteristic of the grotesque mode" which invokes the most disturbing realities in order to subdue them. Busza goes on to point out the "duality" in Conrad's ideological intention: "while he ridicules the English overvaluation of things Russian, he does not want England to underestimate Russia".

is its exploration of surveillance. Conrad had, as we have seen, addressed the ethics of state surveillance in a domestic context in *The Secret Agent*, with a political conclusion that questioned the state's right to monitor its own citizens. *Under Western Eyes* considers similar issues in the different context of Tsarist Russia and its reach into Western Europe; the depth and complexity of this novel's exploration of surveillance is suggested by its use of two strongly contrasting characters to embody the power of the Russian state, General T— and Councillor Mikulin.

In his 1920 'Author's Note', Conrad protests that his "greatest anxiety" in writing the novel "was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality" (xxx), a note that is conspicuously absent from the ferocious rhetorical attack on Tsarist Russia in 'Autocracy and War'. However, it is difficult to reconcile this intention, recollected of course in hindsight, with how, on the surface at least, the novel presents Russian autocracy. For example, the narrator observes that no "young Englishman" could have, like Razumov, "an hereditary and personal knowledge of the means by which a historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence" (25), before noting Razumov's own attraction to the idea of "the great autocrat of the future" (35). Another powerful example follows the narrator's first meetings with Mrs and Miss Haldin, when he notes: "Whenever two Russians come together, the shadow of autocracy is with them, tinging their thoughts, their views, their most intimate feelings, their private life, their public utterances – haunting the secret of their silences" (107). Such observations accord with the polemic of 'Autocracy of War', and the same may be said for the novel's presentation of General T—, whom Razumov regards as "a goggle-eyed imbecile" (45).

General T—'s exact official function remains unspecified, but we can infer that his position is at the top of Russia's security apparatus, indicated by his seniority, his

bodyguard force of Cossacks and gendarmes, Razumov's assumption that he has been "entrusted with so much arbitrary power" (51), Prince K—'s decision that he should hear Razumov's narrative about Haldin, and his personal involvement in Haldin's interrogation. Indeed, for Razumov at least, General T—, and his gaze specifically, *is* the Tsarist regime: his "goggle eyes" are "the embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible" (84). What obviously links gaze and autocracy is surveillance. Razumov's attribution of emblematic significance to the General's eyes comes not during Razumov's encounter with him at the General's house, but in his own room when he reads the invitation "to present himself without delay at the General Secretariat" (84). It is a "vision" (the pun illustrating another aspect of the complexity of the novel's handling of its principal image-system) suggesting not only that Razumov has synecdochically located Russia's autocratic power in the gaze of one of its senior officials, but also that he feels the oppressive power of the regime's surveillance in his own room. (Razumov had earlier imagined General T— as a "goggle-eyed" police agent, watching Haldin flee from his lodging house [64]). The narrator goes on to explain Razumov's conception of the General: "He embodied the whole power of autocracy because he was its guardian. He was the incarnate suspicion, the incarnate anger, the incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social régime on its defence" (84). The General's gaze also indicates that his defensive political doctrine is not solely a rational response to the security threats he is presumably employed to thwart, but is also an expression of an instinctive predilection to arbitrary and inhumane practices: "when the General turned to the providential young man, his florid complexion, the blue, unbelieving eyes and the bright white flash of an automatic smile had an air of jovial, careless cruelty" (44). When General T— alludes to the measures ("no child's play") that he intends to use on Haldin "to make him sing

a little", the narrator comments: "His eyes which he turned upon Razumov seemed to be starting out of his head. This grotesqueness of aspect no longer shocked Razumov" (46). The General's gaze, then, symbolizes not only surveillance but also the cruel and arbitrary oppression that surveillance can enable.

General T— therefore embodies the construction of Russia that Conrad presented discursively in 'Autocracy and War'. He also resembles several representatives of Russian tyranny in Edwardian espionage fiction, some of whom have their autocratic dispositions similarly readable in their faces and gazes. Le Queux's Khostoff, for example, possesses an international network of agents surveilling Russia's opponents in foreign capitals, and "a sharp penetrating eye" (Le Queux 1904, 267). Oberg, the tyrannical governor of Finland in *The Czar's Spy*, has a "bony face, with high cheek-bones, slight grey side-whiskers, hard mouth and black eyes set closely together"; his face "bore the mark of evil upon it – the keen, sinister countenance of one who could act without any compunction and without regret. Truly one would not be surprised at any cruel, dastardly action of a man with such a face – the face of an oppressor" (Le Queux 1905: 267). General T—'s function as a personification of autocracy is not, then, out of place in contemporary representations of Russian statecraft.

If it is possible to imagine General T— as a character in one of Le Queux's novels, the same cannot be said of the General's "former schoolfellow and lifelong friend", Mikulin (*UWE* 306). Despite being products of the same system, their dispositions are clearly in contrast, and this is again revealed to Razumov in their eyes. Having braced himself to confront General T—'s "possible excesses of power and passion", Razumov is "troubled" to find, instead, the "broad, soft physiognomy" and

"mild and thoughtful manner" of Mikulin (86). What appears to concern Razumov is the lack of any evidence in Mikulin's gaze of General T—'s autocratic cruelty:

> His mild expectant glance was turned on the door already when Razumov entered. […] He followed Razumov with his eyes while that last crossed the room and sat down. The mild gaze rested on him, not curious, not inquisitive – certainly not suspicious – almost without expression. In its passionless persistence there was something resembling sympathy. (86)

Mikulin's gaze is the opposite of what Razumov – and the reader – would expect from an interrogator like General T—, and this dissonance arouses Razumov's suspicions: "'I must be very prudent with him', he warned himself in the silence during which they sat gazing at each other" (86). Razumov's fear appears to be that Mikulin is a more sophisticated and ingenious – and therefore dangerous – interrogator than the passionate, unsophisticated General T—: "Razumov's mistrust became acute. The main point was, not to be drawn into saying too much" (87). During the dialogue he tries to remain detached, but Mikulin's own detachment, signified by his gaze, unsettles him: "Councillor Mikulin looked at him dimly. Razumov's self-confidence abandoned him completely" (90). Mikulin maintains his detachment even when revealing that Haldin is dead, and that he signed the execution order himself. Hearing this news, a disoriented Razumov prepares to leave, but Mikulin calls him back: "Councillor Mikulin's arms were stretched out on the table before him and his body leaned forward a little with an effort of his dim gaze" (94). Razumov then launches into a "tirade" about Haldin which fails to stir Mikulin: "The bearded bureaucrat sat at his post, mysteriously self-possessed like an idol with dim, unreadable eyes," causing Razumov's voice to change "involuntarily" (95). Whereas General T—'s eyes imprint themselves on Razumov's mind, Mikulin's are so unreadable that their "dimness"

seems to Razumov to grow and obscure his features (95), a metaphorical correlative of his enigmatic nature.

Mikulin's detachment disarms Razumov, and for the reader it creates a mystery: we cannot, at this point, read Mikulin's significance in the novel's political scheme, that is whether he represents, like General T—, the surveilling autocracy. Nor do we yet realize that his occupation is espionage, something the narrator avoids revealing when he records discreetly that "Razumov learned later that he was the chief of a department in the General Secretariat, with a rank in the civil service equivalent to that of a colonel in the army" (86-87). Indeed, Conrad was evidently concerned to conceal Mikulin's affiliation at this stage in the novel's final version, as the *Razumov* MS explicitly has Mikulin as "chief of a departement [sic] in the third section of the Secretariat" (Kirschner 1996: 277).[11] The sense of mystery is heightened by the repeated use of aposiopesis in Mikulin's speech: "'Though as a matter of fact …'" (87); "Religious belief, of course, is a great …'" (90); "'Everybody I am sure can …'" (98). When the narrative returns to Mikulin at the beginning of Part Fourth, some of the mystery is solved by the revelation of Mikulin's recruitment of Razumov, at the address of an oculist, as an instrument of surveillance – the location providing yet another connection to the organizing theme of visual surveillance.[12] Mikulin's function in the Tsarist state is also revealed: having been General T—'s "confidant and right-hand man" and an influential head of department in the General Secretariat, after his first interview with Razumov, "as fate would have it […] Councillor Mikulin's discreet abilities were rewarded by a very responsible post – nothing less than the

[11] Kirschner notes this as an anachronism since the Third Section had been replaced by the Okhrana in 1880; however, as discussed above, in fiction at least the designation persisted.

[12] There is, of course, a complementary and mostly subsidiary theme of eavesdropping, alluded to by Mikulin's "Listening is a great art" (92), and which becomes dominant at the end of Part Fourth when Razumov is deafened by a gleeful Nikita.

direction of the general police supervision over Europe" (306-07). Mikulin's suitability for work requiring "the perfecting of the service which watches the revolutionist activities abroad" (307) is clear from his skills of visual attentiveness and recollection: "he forgot no-one who ever fell under his observation" (306). Mikulin, therefore, by virtue of both his skills and his official functions is an essential expression of the Russian state's surveillance of its perceived enemies.

For this reason, given the distaste that the novel displays towards Russian autocracy (and which, as we have seen, was evident also in the period's popular fiction), and the strength of Conrad's attacks on Russian statecraft in 'Autocracy and War', we might expect Mikulin to be subject to a particular hostile treatment. Some critics have, indeed, viewed Mikulin as a villain. Carabine (1996: 244), notably, accepts the narrator's invitation to read Razumov's dialogues with Mikulin as having "the sinister character of old legendary tales where the Enemy of Mankind is represented holding subtly mendacious dialogues with some tempted soul" (*UWE* 304-05), and describes Mikulin as "the truly satanic tempter in this text". Mikulin, Carabine argues, "is cynically ready to condemn his victim to everlasting secrecy, thereby generating both his terrible isolation and the corruption of his 'soul'" (1996: 244). The adverb is well-chosen, in that the narrator identifies "cynicism" as the "key-word" which discovers "the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface" (67): Mikulin's use of Razumov, concealed by what Carabine sees as "feigned sympathy" for and flattery of Razumov, is in this reading nothing more than exploitation. It is certainly the case that Razumov's value for Mikulin is instrumental:

> He saw great possibilities of special usefulness in that uncommon young man on whom he had a hold already, with his peculiar temperament, his unsettled mind and shaken conscience, a struggling in the toils of a false position. … It

> was as if the revolutionists themselves had put into his hand that tool so much finer than the common base instruments, so perfectly fitted, if only vested with sufficient credit, to penetrate into places inaccessible to common informers. Providential! Providential! (307)

Furthermore, the narrator goes on to confirm that, while this was a special opportunity for Mikulin, his skill as a spymaster lies in his ability to perceive instrumental value in others:

> Things and men have always a certain sense, a certain side by which they must be got hold of if one wants to obtain a solid grasp and a perfect command. The power of Councillor Mikulin consisted in the ability to seize upon that sense, that side in the men he used. It did not matter to him what it was – vanity, despair, love, hate, greed, intelligent pride or stupid conceit, it was all one to him as long as the man could be made to serve. (307)

In addition, these passages demonstrate how Mikulin's role enables some of the novel's political analysis. As I have argued in Chapter 2 above, the instrumental use of informers reveals a disillusioned political analysis in Conrad's novels as in Hueffer's *Fifth Queen* trilogy, and here Mikulin's exploitation of Razumov resembles Vladimir's instrumental use of Verloc. However, there is other evidence which, if not exactly exculpatory, suggests that Mikulin should not be judged too quickly and too harshly. In quoting the narrator's invitation to see Mikulin as a satanic figure, Carabine overlooks the narrator's subsequent qualification:

> Let me but remark that the Evil One, with his single passion of satanic pride for the only motive, is yet, on a larger, modern view, allowed to be not quite as black as he used to be painted. With what greater latitude, then, should we appraise the exact shade of mere mortal man, with his many passions and his

> miserable ingenuity in error, always dazzled by the base glitter of mixed motives, everlastingly betrayed by a short-sighted wisdom. (305)

While it is possible to read "larger, modern view" as ironic, what follows is clearly a sincere appeal for sympathy for Mikulin. The question then becomes whether the narrative endorses such a sympathetic approach.

There is, I believe, evidence that it does. First, while Carabine blames Mikulin for Razumov's predicament, it is striking that Razumov does not. In Razumov's view, it is Haldin who is to blame, as the narrator, interpreting Razumov's journal, makes clear throughout the narrative, including in a passage directly quoted from the journal, written after his confession to Natalia: Haldin is "this man who had robbed me of my hard-working, purposeful existence" (358). There is no suggestion in his confessions to Natalia or to the anarchists that he feels seduced by Mikulin, whom he does not even mention. This avoidance of blame may be an effect of Mikulin's skill in selecting and employing human instruments, although again the text, when Mikulin's skills are discussed, invites us to take a balanced view. As we have seen, Mikulin's "passionless", persistent gaze has "something resembling sympathy" (86), the qualification suggesting that Mikulin's attitude may be feigned or at best an approximation of sympathy. However, even if it is for instrumental purposes, Mikulin's capacity for sympathy, or empathy, is confirmed by Razumov's feeling that Mikulin "was, perhaps, the only man in the world able to understand his conduct" (297); Razumov attends meetings with Mikulin "with a certain eagerness, which may appear incredible till it is remembered that Councillor Mikulin was the only person on earth with whom Razumov could talk" (304). Second, the narrator humanizes Mikulin with some suggestive, even comic commentary on his private life as "a bachelor with a love of comfort, living alone in an apartment of five rooms luxuriously furnished; and

was known by his intimates to be an enlightened patron of the art of female dancing" (305). Third, the narrator reports Mikulin's discussion of Razumov's future with Prince K— in a sequence that discloses Mikulin's downfall. Indeed, this fact, "which did not occur till some years later" (306) is disclosed before the fact of Mikulin's promotion, the narrator's commentary on his skill as a spymaster, and his comments on Mikulin's power and authority, when he invites us to imagine Mikulin and General T— discussing Razumov "with the full sense of their unbounded power over all the lives in Russia, with cursory disdain, like two Olympians glancing at a worm" (306). This distinctively Conradian prolepsis conditions the reader's response to elicit sympathy for a man who is both "servant" and victim of "the savage autocracy" (306), while reminding us that power is temporary. Mikulin's acceptance of fate (or, to use his own term, Providence) both suggests the totalitarian nature of that autocracy and makes us see his nobility: "in the stir of vaguely seen monstrosities, in that momentary, mysterious disturbance of muddy waters, Councillor Mikulin went under, dignified, with only a calm, emphatic protest of his innocence – nothing more" (305). The passage does not acquit Mikulin of cynicism and participation in the savage autocracy – he retains "complete fidelity to the secrets of the miserable *arcana imperii* deposited in his patriotic breast" (305) – but although his fidelity is to a system of repression, it is in its way admirable, as signalled by the phrase "bureaucratic stoicism", albeit "not without a certain cynical grandeur of self-sacrifice". The presentation of Mikulin's downfall is, therefore, complex and highly nuanced.

What the story of his downfall achieves, above all, is to reconcile the novel's condemnation of Russia with a more complex and psychologically convincing picture than would be achieved by converting the rhetoric of 'Autocracy and War' into a one-dimensional satire. Mikulin's proleptically foreshadowed transition from Olympian

spymaster "into a corpse, and actually into something very much like a common convict" enables the narrator to state the obvious, political conclusion: "It seems that the savage autocracy, no more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well" (306). There may be an allusion here to Cronus (Saturn) devouring his children, or to the "ravenous ghoul" of *One Thousand and One Nights*: as in 'Autocracy and War', Russia here is more of an unstoppable force or unalterable condition than it is a political system, even though the aside embraces democracy in its inclusively pessimistic scope. Moreover, the conclusion that tyranny and victimisation are both essential to Russia and Russians was clearly deeply held by Conrad, as it is also indicated in a brief glimpse into Vladimir's psychology in *The Secret Agent*: "Descended from generations victimised by the instruments of an arbitrary power, he was racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police. It was an inherited weakness, altogether independent of his judgment, of his reason, of his experience. He was born to it" (169). This fear of authority, "which resembled the irrational horror some people have of cats," has become so essential to the Russian national character as to predispose its people to victimisation, even such an unsympathetic representative of autocracy as Vladimir.

Conclusion: Conrad, Soskice, and Dostoevsky

There are at least two sources that Conrad drew on for Mikulin, consideration of which will help to show how Conrad shaped his subject matter and source material, and also what kind of novel *Under Western Eyes* is. Mikulin's downfall entered the narrative during what Carabine (1996: 50) calls "an astonishing burst of creative energy" in November 1909 during which Conrad wrote over ten thousand words of

Razumov. Conrad would, therefore, have had available to him at this point the March 1909 issue of the *English Review*, the magazine founded by Hueffer and with which Conrad was closely associated both when edited by Hueffer and when edited by Austin Harrison after the magazine was bought by the industrialist Sir Alfred Mond.[13] As well as the fourth part of Conrad's *Some Reminiscences*, the May 1909 issue carried (816-832) an article, 'The Russian Spy System. The Azeff Scandals in Russia', signed by 'D.S'. 'D.S.' was David Soskice, Hueffer's brother-in-law, whose role in Hueffer's struggles to keep the magazine in funds appeared to have infuriated Conrad to the point that he described Soskice in an angry letter as a "Russian Jew refugee" (*CL*4 266; Harding 2009: 223). Soskice's article, a denunciation of Tsarist espionage methods in general and a double-agent, Eugene Azeff, in particular, has been recognised as bearing an important relationship with Conrad's novel: Peter Ivanovitch, General T—, and Father Zosim all have analogues in Soskice's essay.[14] Baines sees A.A. Lopukhin, St. Peterburg's Chief of Police until his trial for collusion with revolutionary organisations in 1909, as a model for Mikulin (Baines 1993: 371). What does not, however, appear to have been noticed is that details about Mikulin, especially in Part Fourth, appear to have been drawn from Soskice's presentation of Pyotr Ivanovich Ratchkovsky, the head of the Okhrana's Foreign Agency from 1885 to 1902 and whose lasting legacy is the anti-Semitic fabrication *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the creation of which Ratchkovsky is now believed to have organized (Johnson 1972, Andrew 2010: 7). Like Mikulin, Ratchkovsky according to Soskice had

[13] For a compelling account of Conrad's association with the *English Review*, see Harding 2009. It was during Harrison's tenure that *Under Western Eyes* was serialized in the magazine, from December 1910 to October 1911.

[14] See Baines (1993: 371), Harding (2009: 231), and Carabine (1996: 179). Carabine notes that Conrad was well advanced with writing *Razumov* when the article was published, suggesting that he and Soskice may have drawn on the same reservoir of information, as well as being influenced directly at a late stage of composition.

"unbounded power": he was "the omnipotent chief of the foreign service of the Russian political police", in command of an international network of agents and able to provide Azeff, his informer in the Social Revolutionary Party, with money and immunity from arrest, despite the latter's involvement in terrorism (Soskice 1909: 817). Indeed, in Soskice's polemic, Azeff was not merely an "agent provocateur" (although he uses that label throughout), provoking others to carry out acts of terrorism, but one of Russia's most active and ruthless terrorists. Soskice claims Azeff "beat the record in the slaying of tyrants", including being one of "the leading organizers" in the assassination of Plehve, whilst keeping Ratchkovsky fully apprised of his plans, and "was actually the head of that terrible 'Fighting Organisation' […] which for a whole decade held the Tsar and his camarilla in awe and practical captivity" (818). The lengths to which Ratchkovsky was prepared to go in order to protect his agent included arranging for the murder of another police agent, Tatarov, so that suspicions gathering around Azeff could be deflected: Ratchkovsky was "probably only too glad to sacrifice the smaller fry in order to preserve Azeff" (821). A complex web of cynical betrayals also, for Soskice, explains the murder of his own friend George Gapon, killed in1906 by revolutionaries who suspected him of being a double-agent: Soskice rejects the allegation of betrayal, preferring to see Gapon's relationship with Ratchkovsky as mere pragmatism, and blames Azeff for Gapon's murder with the motive that Azeff feared Gapon would become a rival (823-24). Nevertheless, Ratchkovsky fell from favour, at least in de Plehve's eyes:

> Many years later, however, Ratchkovsky came to grief. Plehve was then the omnipotent Dictator of Russia. He was for some reason displeased with Ratchkovsky and recalled him from his post abroad to Russia. Plehve distrusted both Ratchkovsky and Azeff and wished even totally to abolish the foreign service of the Russian police. But in this he was overruled by the Court. He

> then decided entirely to reorganise the *Okhranka* and the news of this decision filled the numerous agents of the *Okhranka* with dismay. (830)

In fact, Ratchkovsky's fall was temporary and he does not appear to have suffered the fate of Mikulin, or even of Lopukhin. Soskice turns this anecdote into yet more evidence of criminal conspiracy on the part of Ratchkovsky and Azeff by suggesting that their motive for arranging Plehve's assassination was to thwart his attempts at bureaucratic reform. This cynical and corrupt relationship between a senior official and a murderous, career terrorist, who betrayed and murdered members of both sides, exemplifies for Soskice the Tsarist political system: "How can the Government prevent the reappearance of an Azeff, when Azeff practically personifies the whole Governmental system of Russia?" (828). Indeed, Soskice goes further and identifies the system of "autocratic bureaucracy" which enabled the rise of Azeff and Rachkovsky as the "venomous activity which poisons the life of the nature"; Russian espionage is, then, both cause and effect of Russian tyranny.

The influence of this material on *Under Western Eyes* is obvious, although the novel resists simple equivalences. Azeff's murderous career is clearly reflected in Nikita's: as Sophia Antonovna observes, "he was always ready to kill. […] He killed – yes! in both camps. The fiend…" (*UWE* 381). The murder of Tatarov may have influenced both Razumov's fate and Nikita's – the latter's exposure being engineered, according to Sophia Antonovna, by Mikulin who, she claims, "had wanted to get rid of that particular agent of his own!" (381). The narrator also follows Soskice's lead in interpreting this episode of spies betraying spies as a diagnosis of "things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes" (381). Mikulin himself resembles not only Ratchkovsky but also, as Baines noted, Lopukhine: Soskice quotes a letter by Lopukhine exposing Azeff's double-agency which had been published in

the press, and claims that the Russian Government "decided to hush up the Lopukhine-Azeff scandal" by raiding Lopukhine's house, imprisoning him and confiscating his papers" (Soskice 1909: 828). More broadly, both texts coincide – and coincide with popular representations of Russia – in presenting Russia's espionage system as globally pervasive, sophisticated, and focused on *émigré* dissidents as well as domestic revolutionaries.

The principal difference between Soskice's and Conrad's texts are their analyses of political agency. Soskice interprets his material conspiratorially, seeing the hands of Azeff and Ratchkovsky behind every incident, while exonerating the revolutionaries where possible including, as we have seen, his friend Gapon. Russian autocracy is thus confined to corrupt figures in the regime: it pervades the Tsarist system but does not extend to the revolutionaries, who are largely exonerated of any wrongdoing. Conrad's view is no less unforgiving of Russian autocracy, but he does not interpret the material so conspiratorially, or rather he sees both the regime and its opponents as equally conspiratorial: the plots of the revolutionaries are genuine, not the product of deceptions by functionaries of the state. Mikulin, for instance, is proved right about the anarchists in Geneva: they are plotting an armed insurrection.[15] In *Under Western Eyes*, both the servants of autocracy and the proponents of revolution are damned equally, and it serves the novel's ideological purpose to have Mikulin portrayed as being considerably more complex and sympathetic than Soskice's Ratchkovsky.

The strength of influence exerted on *Under Western Eyes* by Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* has been covered in depth by for example Busza and Ash (1999: 256-74). Razumov's dialogues with Mikulin clearly illustrate this influence,

[15] See pp. 235-36 below for further details on the anarchists' planned insurrection in Russia's Baltic provinces.

with numerous similarities between them and Porfiry's dialogues with Raskolnikov having been noted by Fogel (1985: 196-99), Carabine (1996: 244), and others. Fogel (1985: 197) describes Porfiry as "a shrewd comedian […] brilliant, awful, shallow, funny – Dostoevsky's image of 'Western' reason as a process", adding that his dialogues with Raskolnikov resemble both Menippean satire (a classical sub-genre, usually in prose, attacking attitudes rather than individuals) and Socratic dialogue (after Socrates' pedagogical practice of encouraging rational thought by questions). Fogel calls Mikulin a "revision" of Porfiry, and sees both him and Razumov in their dialogues as "travesties" of Socrates, "forced together in a bureaucratic interview", with Mikulin's "rugged Socratic forehead" (*UWE* 90) suggesting that the resemblance to Socratic dialogue is not accidental on Conrad's part. Fogel also helpfully points out some of the differences: Mikulin has "a more burdened quality" than Porfiry, and in "detail after detail" is "an atonal version of his original: nowhere as pleasing or funny, nowhere as playfully thrilling, not as personally free, but in fact the bearer of much more determining power": Mikulin's agency is demonstrated by his recruitment of Razumov, whereas Raskolnikov's fate is determined not by Porfiry but by the awakening of his own conscience. This revision of Porfiry, Fogel persuasively concludes, shows a rejection of Dostoevsky's defence of autocracy "as the harmless spawning ground of spiritual freedom" (Fogel 1985: 198). Carabine (1996: 244) similarly comments that "the dialogues reverse the pattern of the Porfiry-Raskolnikov exchanges in *Crime and Punishment*, in which the police chief wants his quarry to confess his guilt *and* to save his soul", but draws the very different conclusion that the "satanic tempter" Mikulin is the agent of Razumov's isolation and hence "the corruption of his 'soul'". Similarly, Ash (1999: 268) sees Mikulin as the exploiter of his "victim" Razumov, comparing him unfavourably with Porfiry, who has a

"sympathetic understanding of Raskolnikov's plight". Either way, it is clear that one of Mikulin's functions in the novel is to be a rewriting of Dostoevsky's Porfiry – a pivot in the philosophic and ideological scheme of *Crime and Punishment* – and thereby to challenge and overcome that scheme. Mikulin thus illustrates Busza's point that Conrad "writes Razumov's story into the imaginative space created by Dostoevsky's narratives in order to define as sharply as possible his ideological disagreement with Dostoevsky, as well as to subvert the latter's postulates. The relationship of Conrad's text to Dostoevsky's writing is thus partly dialectical and partly parodic" (Busza 1976: 111). This intertextual confrontation is, for Busza, not simply a matter of authorial source-management, but a strategy to elicit the reader's participation in a rejection of Dostoevsky's ethics: "the parallels between Conrad's novel and Dostoevsky's fiction are sufficiently numerous and obvious to suggest that Conrad meant his readers to make the connection" (Busza 1976: 111). As Busza notes, Conrad's friend Constance Garnett was working on her translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* (published in 1912) at the time Conrad was writing *Under Western Eyes*, and this and subsequent translations would situate Dostoevsky's work at the forefront of British cultural appreciation of Russian literature. However, Conrad's novel predated the publication of all of Garnett's translations of Dostoevsky, including *Crime and Punishment* which did not appear until 1914. Therefore, if Conrad meant the parallels to be recognized, it could only be by a tiny community of enthusiasts who could read Russian or, like Conrad, French.[16] If Busza is right, *Under Western Eyes* is most closely related to a literature that was available only to an intellectual elite.

The novel also derived material, as we have seen, from another intellectual publication, the *English Review*, whose circulation under Hueffer's editorship was

[16] Carabine (1996: 78) shows that Conrad read Dostoevsky in French in the 1880s.

around 1,000, and whose cover price (2s. 6d.) suggested exclusivity. The point, however, is not so much where the material came from, but how Conrad handled it. In the case of 'The Azeff Scandal' he appropriated and refashioned details to fit a different ideological purpose. In the case of *Crime and Punishment*, he set up a dialogue with Dostoevsky's novel that engaged not only with topical questions about the nature of Russia rule and whether it posed a threat to British power and civil society – questions that were as urgent in popular as in literary fiction – but also with the ethical and even metaphysical questions raised in Dostoevsky's novel.

As well as illuminating the differences between *Under Western Eyes* and two of its sources, this discussion may also illuminate differences between *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent.* Their subjects can be seen to be broadly similar, although, as Conrad acknowledged to Methuen, *The Secret Agent*'s subject embraced the "sensational" aspects of espionage and terrorism, whereas as Conrad told Edward Garnett, *Under Western Eyes* was "concerned with nothing but ideas, to the exclusion of everything else" (*CL*4 489). The starkest contrasts between the two novels are more matters of treatment than subject, such as the sustained use of irony in the former compared with the psychological and political analysis of the latter. The intertextual associations of the two spymasters illustrate some significant differences in the technical and aesthetic treatment of the subject of espionage in the two novels. In *The Secret Agent* Conrad took material from detective and espionage fiction and used irony to retell it with both scorn and pity, with the figure of the spymaster remaining a character type that we can recognize from 'popular' antecedents. In *Under Western Eyes*, despite retaining many of the ideological and narrative functions of the character type, Mikulin is barely recognizable as a spymaster of the espionage genre. In this novel, the influence of Dostoevsky appears to have overwhelmed the influence of

popular fiction, and Conrad's urge to confront ideas, including the idea of Russia itself, dictated a degree of complexity and sympathy in Mikulin that is absent from the villainous Vladimir.

Chapter 4

"The cowardly bomb-throwing brutes":

Anarchists, Terrorists, and Revolutionaries

Introduction: Anarchism and Conrad's Circle

Conrad's engagement with anarchism and terrorism covered a five-year period, beginning in 1905 with 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer', two short stories he intended to place in a "special volume" of stories linked by the theme of anarchism, along with a third, provisionally entitled 'Verloc' (*CL*3 338, 346). He then abandoned this project in 1906 as the third story grew to become *The Secret Agent*. Also in 1906, Conrad told Pinker he was considering a fourth anarchist tale featuring a bomb in a hotel, a project he does not appear to have developed (*CL*3 326). By the time Conrad completed *Under Western Eyes* in 1910, he had, therefore, written four narratives featuring anarchists, and considered a fifth.[1]

While it is clear that the themes of anarchism, terrorism, and revolutionary conspiracies had been prominent in fiction for twenty years by the time Conrad approached them in 1905, these themes entail some problems of nomenclature, typology, and ideology. It almost goes without saying that the label 'terrorist' is contested, and that its use may be acutely ideological and pejorative.[2] Its original use in English, to designate state repression rather than violence by marginalized or oppositional groups, gives a flavour of some of the problems. Other labels used in the

[1] Hampson (2012a: 97) notes that anarchists and secret societies also emerge in the later chapters of *Nostromo* (1904).

[2] The earliest meaning of "terrorism" in English, used in 1795 by Edmund Burke, associated it with violence by the state against its own citizens – the historical sense in which the word is used in Conrad's *The Rover* (1923) to label Scevola. The use of the word to describe politically motivated violence, often by groups against states, is first recorded in 1806 (*OED*).

late-Victorian/Edwardian period and subsequently are not much more precise. 'Nihilist', for example, was a term that achieved currency after its use by Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons* (1862) to designate a specific Russian oppositional, philosophical movement, but it then became used interchangeably with 'anarchist' or 'revolutionary' in works such as *For Maimie's Sake* and William Le Queux's *The Czar's Spy.* This creates a difficulty for an assessment of Conrad's fiction against character types in popular fiction when a clear and stable character type is impossible to define. This chapter will, therefore, address the problem of nomenclature by offering a typology of the fictional anarchist drawn from contemporary sources in order to provide a framework for categorizing the terrorists, anarchists and revolutionaries in Conrad's fiction. I shall use this framework to examine genre and ideology: fictional anarchists appeared in detective fiction and science fiction as well as more realistic, political fictions, and an understanding of this generic variability will help us assess the generic position of Conrad's anarchist stories; dissent and political violence are inescapably ideological topics, so examining Conrad's choice of which kinds of anarchist/terrorist/revolutionary to include in the narrative, and how he handles those characters, will illuminate Conrad's ideological positions in the contemporary cultural context.[3]

Conrad initially explained his interest in anarchism as being commercially motivated. On 29 December 1905 he told Galsworthy: "I write these [anarchist] stories

[3] For Ó Donghaile, the choice of genre is an index of ideology: conservative writers such as Stevenson and Coulson Kernahan chose quest narratives to show anarchist or Fenian criminals being hunted by amateur detectives, while anti-colonial writers like Tom Greer and Donald McKay chose science fiction in order to show their anarchist/Fenian scientific geniuses holding a humbled British Empire to account. Whilst Ó Donghaile is right to demonstrate the generic range of fictions featuring anarchists and terrorists, his analysis is too simplistic: Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist* (1893), for example, uses similar science fiction tropes to Greer's and McKay's novels (e.g. an airship that can rain destruction onto British cities) while presenting Hartmann as a crazed and embittered over-reacher. Fictional anarchists in the period come in several shapes and sizes, and perform a range of functions, not always clearly ideological ones.

because they bring more money than the sea papers", meaning the sketches collected in 1906 as *The Mirror of the Sea* (*CL*3 300).[4] In June 1906, as 'Verloc' extended, he told Galsworthy that his "long Anarch: Story is becoming topical anyhow", referring to the attempted assassination in Madrid on 31 May 1906 of the Spanish King, Alfonso XIII, at his wedding to King Edward VII's niece, Princess Victoria Eugenie, with a bomb concealed in a bouquet of flowers. The connection in Conrad's mind between commercial success and topicality, implicit here, emerges more strongly in a series of letters to Pinker written in May 1907 when Conrad returned to *The Secret Agent*, after its serialization in *Ridgway's*, significantly extending the novel for its publication in volume form in September 1907. However, Conrad's view of that novel's commercial possibilities appears in these letters to be neither clear nor consistent. On 6 May 1907, discussing a project subsequent to *The Secret Agent*, he informed Methuen that he was "striking a blow for popularity", implying that he did not expect *The Secret Agent* to be popular; on 18 May he told Pinker that "[t]here is an element of popularity" in *The Secret Agent*, while immediately introducing a qualification: "I don't mean to say that the thing is likely to be popular. I merely think that it shows traces of capacity for that sort of treatment which may make a novel popular" (*CL*3 339-40). On 30 July he told Pinker that *The Secret Agent* "is *not* the sort of novel to make what comes after more difficult to place. Neither will it I fancy knock my prices down" (*CL*3 460). Conrad's letters to Galsworthy suggest that he understood that events were likely to influence public taste, while the letters to Pinker suggest he did not consider *The Secret Agent* to have a commercially promising subject, even if its treatment did have that potential.

[4] The "sea papers" were, in fact, fairly lucrative: many of the short essays were sold to newspapers and magazines in Britain and America before the book-form was published by Methuen, with *Pall Mall Magazine* for example offering six guineas per thousand words (Watts 1989: 95, 146). To illustrate the number and range of publications which carried the essays, see *Conrad First* (http://www.conradfirst.net/view/volume?id=10).

Despite the contradictions and uncertainties in Conrad's opinions at the time, it is nevertheless clear now that anarchism, especially in its violent manifestation, was a subject that sold books, especially when political violence was a fact or a fear in the minds of readers. The 1880s notably saw a surge in political violence in Britain with a mainland bombing campaign mounted by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, known as the 'Fenians', from 1881 to 1885, as well as spectacular anarchist attacks overseas, such as the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in St. Petersburg in 1881. These events clearly inspired the publication, from the mid 1880s onwards, of a significant number of what are now called 'dynamite novels', the term used in Barbara Melchiori's influential literary-historical survey, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (1985).[5] Many of these novels dealt with violence by Irish republicans, such as Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's collection of linked tales, *More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter* (1885), which includes a dedication to two British police officers injured while attempting to defuse a bomb in Parliament in January 1885 (Stevenson and Stevenson 1984: v). Others have a more international focus, such as Henry James's novel of class and revolutionary politics, *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and Grant Allen's *For Maimie's Sake* (1886), which, as its sub-title (*A Tale of Love and Dynamite*) implies, improbably combines romance and violent anarchism.

In the two subsequent decades, anarchists retained their currency in news, with events such as the notorious bombings of an opera house in Barcelona in 1893 and a café in Paris in 1894, as well as Martial Bourdin's failed bombing attempt in the same year. As a result, according to one critic of the dynamite novel and its successors, in both low and high culture "the theme of terrorism saturated the late Victorian and

[5] Melchiori's bibliography (251-52) is especially useful, identifying around forty novels, half of which were published between 1884 and 1886. Ó Donghaile's analysis (2011) is also useful, although its argument that the aesthetic shocks provided by the dynamite novel were a precursor of British literary modernism in the twentieth century is not wholly convincing.

Edwardian literary consciousness" (Ó Donghaile 2011: 8). This saturation is evident in social and political commentary as well as in fiction. In his popular three-volume survey *Mysteries of Police and Crime* (1898), for example, the journalist and prisons administrator Arthur Griffiths saw anarchist terrorism in an age of social and scientific innovation as an increasing and potentially apocalyptic threat: "Murderous organisations have increased in size and scope; they are more daring, they are served by the more terrible weapons offered by modern science, and the world is nowadays threatened by new forces which, if recklessly unchained, may some day wreak universal devastation" (Griffiths 1898: 469). Evidence from the period's fiction include E. Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist* (1893), whose eponymous anti-hero, disgusted by civilization, creates an airship to destroy cities from the air with the aim of returning humanity to a more natural state, and George Griffith's *The Angel of the Revolution* (1893), in which an international syndicate of terrorists, with a secret base under Clapham Common, engineer a global revolution and establish a socialist world-state. Perhaps the most prominent example of anarchists in fiction when Conrad embarked on his own engagement with the subject would have been Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men* (1905), which situates anarchism and terrorism in the debate over immigration that was particularly contested during the passage of the Aliens Bill of that year.[6]

Furthermore, at least two members of Conrad's circle had significant anarchist connections. Ford Madox Hueffer, with whom Conrad collaborated on numerous projects from 1898 to 1909, claimed that he knew "a great many anarchists of the Goodge Street group" and had "provided Conrad with Anarchist literature, with

[6] See Glazzard (2012) for Conrad's possible debt to Wallace, and the latter's use of innovative marketing techniques to ensure his novella was noticed. Wallace went on to become one of the highest selling authors of the twentieth century (see p. 43 above). For the Aliens Bill (enacted 1906) see Glover (1997).

memoirs, with introductions to at least one Anarchist young lady who figures in *The Secret Agent*" (qtd. in Sherry 1971: 206), and Conrad's 1920 "Author's Note" to *The Secret Agent* includes a reference to Hueffer as the "omniscient friend" who provided him with details of the Greenwich case. As often with Conrad's prefaces, it conceals (or misleads) as much as it reveals, and Conrad's stated uncertainty about how Hueffer knew of London's anarchist communities is surely disingenuous, as it is inconceivable that Hueffer kept secret from Conrad the fact that he was the cousin of the teenage anarchists Helen and Olivia Rossetti.[7] Indeed, Conrad's familiarity with the Rossettis is evident from the appearance of the title of their anarchist newspaper, the *Torch*, in the window of Verloc's shop in *The Secret Agent.* Their novel *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (1903, published under the pseudonym 'Isabel Meredith') is an important source for 'The Informer', and, as Sherry has shown, Conrad met Helen Rossetti twice, probably in 1903-4 (Sherry 1971: 213).[8] What this suggests, therefore, is that the information attributed to a "casual conversation" is likely to have been extensive, and gained more directly, than he was prepared to admit to his public. He revealed more to Methuen in November 1906 while working on *The Secret Agent*'s serial version: the novel, he wrote, is "based on the inside knowledge of a certain event in the history of active anarchism" (*CL*3 371).

That knowledge could have been derived from Hueffer, from Cunninghame Graham – who knew the *Commonweal* editor (and possible model for Verloc) H.B. Samuels (Newton 2009: 122) – or from his friend and literary mentor Edward Garnett. Garnett was a prominent champion of Russian culture and cultivated Russian émigrés – a source of considerable friction between the two, as when Conrad sarcastically

[7] For an incisive account of the anarchist connections of Conrad's circle and their bearing on *The Secret Agent*, see Newton (2007: 131-36). Newton is sceptical about the true extent and depth of Hueffer's anarchist links.

[8] See Mulry (2000) and Hampson (2005) in addition to Sherry (1971).

described Garnett, who had objected to the presentation of Russia in *Under Western Eyes*, as "Russian Embassador [*sic*] to the Republic of Letters" (*CL*4 488). Garnett revealingly commented in his reminiscences that his initial interest in meeting Conrad was prompted by the disdain towards Poles expressed by "my Nihilist friends, Stepniak and Volkhovsky" (Najder 1983: 252). Felix Volkhovsky was a leading revolutionary ideologue who taught Russian to Garnett's wife Constance, and 'Stepniak' was the pseudonym of writer and Nihilist Sergei Kravchinsky who claimed asylum in Britain 1884 and whose political and personal associates in London included others in Conrad's circle, such as Cunninghame Graham and Hueffer (Watts 1966: 411). Stepniak, who wrote a novel of anarchist life, *The Career of a Nihilist* (1889), advised Constance Garnett on her translations of Russian novels, and provided prefaces to her translations of Turgenev that were admired by Conrad.[9] Edward Garnett's sister Olive (a contributor to the *Torch*) had an intense yet platonic relationship with Stepniak from 1892 until his accidental death on a West London level crossing in 1895 on his way to meet Volkhovsky (Moser 1984: 6-25).[10] Stepniak's influence was such that "he was the object of considerable interest on the part of radical British intellectuals, the future members of the Fabians, ILP, Labour Party and Social Democrats. It was they who put pressure on him to form an organization in Britain to support the Russian revolutionaries in their struggle against tsarism" (Slatter 1999: 35). However, one incident in Stepniak's career that he endeavoured to keep secret from his admirers in London was his killing of General N.V. Mezentsev, head of the Tsar's secret police, in St Petersburg in 1878 – an

[9] In May 1912, Conrad told Edward Garnett that Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* did not deserve Constance Garnett's "wonderful" translation: Turgenev, along with Tolstoy, are "the only two really worthy of her" (Najder 1983: 373).

[10] Watts (1966: 410) and Moser (1984: 31) note Edgar Wright's suggestion of a resemblance between Stepniak's death and Razumov's collision with a tram in *Under Western Eyes.*

incident that was revealed in Britain by an article in the January 1894 number of the *New Review* (Moser 1984: 15-17). Stepniak thus combined the roles of terrorist fugitive, revolutionary ideologue, and icon of Russian culture, making him a particularly significant and, for Conrad, uncongenial figure.

Typologies of Anarchism

Norman Sherry (1971, 249-51) constructs a typology of anarchism in his discussion of *The Secret Agent*'s anarchists, derived from two contemporary sources, the Rossettis' *A Girl Among the Anarchists* and W.C. Hart's *Confessions of an Anarchist* (1906). The narrator of the former, Isabel, identifies among the anarchists she has met four categories: the "cranks", drawn to anarchist circles but lacking any ideological commitment, the "noble dreamers, incorrigible idealists" who live "in a pure atmosphere of their own creation", the "fanatics" who are "stern, heroic figures", and the criminals (Meredith 1903: 272-74). Sherry's second source is a memoir, the product, its author claims, of spending "some ten years among Anarchists, and in the study of Anarchist publications", Hart having been "secretary to two Anarchist "groups", a "well-known figure in Anarchist circles", and "an occasional contributor with his pen to the *Torch of Anarchy*, *Freedom*, *The Commonweal*, *Liberty*, and *The Alarm*" (Hart 1906: 'Introductory'). Hart's memoir sought to expose anarchism as a creed of hypocrisy, criminality, and occasionally terror, and, drawing on a speech made by Liebknecht,[11] also divided anarchists into four types: "criminals and semi-criminals who throw an Anarchist cloak over their crime", police agents, "the defenders of so-called 'propaganda by deed'", and the "perfect beings" who espouse and abide by a pure anarchist philosophy of rejecting all forms of government, control

[11] Presumably the German Social Democrat Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900).

and social organisation – a type he claims is, in fact, non-existent (a point that Sherry does not acknowledge). Sherry then assigns each of *The Secret Agent*'s anarchists to these categories: "Michaelis stands out as one of Hart's 'perfect beings' and the Rossettis' 'noble dreamers, incorrigible idealists'; the Professor is the fanatic; Verloc, the police agent; Karl Yundt, defender of the 'propaganda of the deed'; and Ossipon, a petty swindler really living off the savings of silly girls" (Sherry 1971: 251).

Sherry's typology is useful, and he is right to point out that Hart's analysis shares with *The Secret Agent* a disdainful view of most forms of anarchism, but it has several limitations. Firstly, his categorization of the novel's anarchists is in some respects imprecise: we can argue for instance that Michaelis is too grotesque to correspond fully to the Rossettis' "incorrigible idealists", that the Professor may be a fanatic but he is hardly a "stern, heroic figure", that Yundt is certainly a defender of the 'propaganda of the deed' (the narrator labels him "the famous terrorist") but is also "moribund" and has never himself acted "against the social edifice" (*SA* 42), and that Ossipon's financial and sexual exploitation of women is not 'cloaked' by anarchism, but separate from it. Secondly, an examination of fictional sources, as I shall show, suggests that there may be several types of anarchists missing from the Rossettis' and Hart's lists. Thirdly, Sherry excludes Conrad's other anarchist stories from his consideration. Finally, Sherry overlooks the significant figure of Stepniak, whose proximity to Conrad's circle makes his analysis of revolutionary movements and nomenclature in *Underground Russia* of particular interest.

Stepniak defines Nihilism as a pejorative term that became "accepted from party pride by those against whom it was employed", and which denoted "a philosophical and literary movement, which flourished in the first decade after the Emancipation of the Serfs", i.e. the 1860s; "It is now absolutely extinct" (Stepniak

1883: 3). Nihilism's philosophical doctrine was "absolute individualism […] the negation, in the name of individual liberty, of all the obligations imposed upon the individual by society, by family life, and by religion" (Stepniak 1883: 4). Stepniak writes that the 1870s saw the rise, inspired by the Paris Commune, of Revolutionary Socialism: "The Revolutionist seeks the happiness of others at whatever cost, sacrificing for it his own. His ideal is a life full of suffering, and a martyr's death" (Stepniak 1883: 13). Ironically, he adds, given this idealism and humanitarian commitment, the Revolutionist attracted the label of 'Nihilist'. The ideal Revolutionist, he suggests, was a propagandist, but words were shown to be insufficient to achieve revolutionary ends, so the late 1870s saw the Revolutionist-propagandist supplanted by the Terrorist (Stepniak 1883: 33). Any suggestion that this might be a regrettable development is contradicted by Stepniak's rhetoric idolizing the Terrorist:

> He is noble, terrible, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimities of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero. […] He has no other object than to overthrow this abhorred despotism, and to give to his country, what all civilized nations possess, political liberty, to enable it to advance with a firm step towards its own redemption. […] But the terrorist is immortal. His limbs may fail him, but, as if by magic, they regain their vigour, and he stands erect, ready for battle after battle until he has laid low his enemy and liberated the country. […] He bends his haughty head before no idol. He has devoted his sturdy arms to the cause of the people. But he no longer deifies them. And if the people, ill-counselled, say to him, 'Be a slave,' he will exclaim 'No;' and he will march onward, defying their imprecations and their fury, certain that justice will be rendered to him in his tomb. (Stepniak 1883: 42-45)

What Stepniak provides, then, is an alternative to the hostile typology advanced by Hart, and the largely disillusioned one provided by the Rossettis. It helpfully defines Nihilism in three ways (pejorative label, philosophical movement, and label incorrectly

applied to Revolutionary Socialism), shows that nineteenth-century revolutionary movements were dynamic, and creates a category of 'Terrorist' that refuses to distinguish between idealists and fanatics. It makes clear, therefore, that recovering a stable taxonomy of anarchism, Nihilism, and terrorism from revolutionary and counter-revolutionary discourse is an impossible task, and alerts us to the effect of perspective and bias on contemporary descriptions of these phenomena.

While the contrasting polemical perspectives of Hart and Stepniak remain useful, the present analysis requires a typology drawn from fictional sources, including (but not of course restricted to) the Rossettis' autobiographical novel. Such a typology will enable us to measure Conrad's anarchists and revolutionaries against fictional precursors and analogues and help us situate his four anarchist narratives in terms of genre and audience. As I shall show, the period's fiction suggests six types of anarchist or revolutionary who might be labelled as 'Nihilist heroes', 'idealistic heroines, 'fashionable revolutionaries', 'propagandists of the word', 'violent extremists', and 'Promethean technologists'.

Nihilist Heroes

In their novels, both Stepniak and the Rossettis present heroic Nihilists whose conduct and commitment to ideals place them above the norms of ordinary human behaviour. In *The Career of a Nihilist*, Stepniak translated his idealization of the terrorist in *Underground Russia* as martyr and hero into a fictional form. The narrator's sympathies with the Nihilist of the title, Andrey, are evident from his description at the novel's opening: "His forehead was touched with traces of early cares, and his eyes were unusually thoughtful; but this did not impair the impression of steadiness and equanimity conveyed by his face and his strong well-shaped figure"

(Stepniak 1889: 3-4). In the earlier stages of his revolutionary career, Andrey is positioned between those Russian oppositionists who seek an accommodation with the regime – a group dubbed "the *Equilibrides*" (Stepniak 1889: 38) – and those anarchists who advocate violence but without a coherent political programme to justify it, as exemplified by Sazepin, "an avowed terrorist, remarkable for the thoroughness and simplicity of his views upon all questions of theory and practice, and for a happy absence of any doubt or uncertainty" (Stepniak 1889: 41). Although Andrey is prepared to justify violence, he is insistent that it must be subject to a set of clear and agreed rules. Indeed, the narrator emphasizes throughout the rules by which the anarchists conduct themselves in all their endeavours, from political murder to personal relationships, presenting Nihilism as philosophy and doctrine. However, while this philosophical position remains constant, Andrey's own willingness to participate in violence changes as the result of the failure of revolutionary endeavours in Dubrovnik which culminate in the execution of several of his friends and fellow Nihilists. However, far from being disillusioned by this failure, Andrey experiences an epiphany. As he looks up at his friend Zina on the scaffold, he realizes that "in that moment everything was changed in him":

> Anxieties and fears, nay, even indignation, regrets, revenge – all were forgotten, submerged by something thrilling, vehement, indescribable. It was more than enthusiasm, more than readiness to bear everything. It was a positive thirst for martyrdom – a feeling he always deprecated in others, and never suspected himself to possess – which burst forth with him now. (Stepniak 1889: 253)

Andrey's "thirst for martyrdom" leads to him renouncing not only his life but also the love of Tania, the beautiful Nihilist he marries before committing himself to an attempt

to assassinate the Tsar. He shoots at the Tsar in St. Petersburg but misses, is captured, and executed, his death marked by a concluding eulogy from the narrator: "He had perished. But the work for which he died did not perish. It goes forward from defeat to defeat towards the final victory, which in this sad world of ours cannot be obtained save by the sufferings and the sacrifice of the chosen few" (Stepniak 1889: 320). Andrey's career thus expresses an ideology of violence and self-sacrifice, in which individual defeat is in reality a contribution to the coming triumph of a revolutionary programme. As in the rhetorical discourse of *Underground Russia*, the novel's emphasis on Andrey's sincerity, commitment to ideals, and personal integrity enables Stepniak to redefine violent action as heroic.

Despite being a narrative of disillusionment, *A Girl Among the Anarchists* contains no less than three anarchist-idealists, all based on real anarchists living in London in the late nineteenth century. The narrator, Isabel, sees two varieties of "fanaticism" in the anarchist movement, one characterized by "the most admirable self-abnegation […] the sacrifice of wealth position and happiness", and the other by "abnormal actions of other kinds", notably "deeds of violence" (Meredith 1903: 188). She condemns exponents of the latter, like Émile Henry, "the dynamitard of the Café Terminus", who engage in "Propaganda by Deed" (Meredith 1903: 188),[12] but the fanatic-idealists of anarchist philosophy are seen in a wholly positive light. At the heart of them is Nekrovitch, "the famous Nihilist" living in Chiswick – a portrait of Stepniak – whose characteristic of an "utter absence of sham or 'side'" (Meredith 1903: 17) prompts an admiring outburst from Isabel that echoes Stepniak's own description of

[12] Henry (1872-94) was executed for bombing the café at the Hôtel Terminus in Paris in 1894, his plan to assassinate the French President having been frustrated by tight security. Henry's eloquent final speech at his trial was widely reported and admired by other anarchists. See Butterworth 2011: 326-28.

the heroic Terrorist in *Underground Russia*: [13]

> Nekrovitch was essentially a great man; one of those men whom to know was to admire and to love; a man of strong intellect, and of the strong personal magnetism which is so frequently an adjunct of genius. Physically he was a huge powerful man, so massive and striking in appearance that he suggested comparison rather with some fact of nature – a rock, a vigorous forest tree – than with another man. He was one of those rare men who, like mountains in a landscape, suffice in themselves to relieve their environments, whatever these may be, from all taint of meanness. (Meredith 1903: 22-23)

Isabel makes clear that Nekrovitch is more than a commanding, charismatic presence: he and the "men of bold and original thought" who attend his house espouse and live by radical philosophies that expand her intellectual and emotional horizons: "The bold thought and lofty ideal which made of each man a law unto himself, answerable for his own actions only to his own conscience, acting righteously towards others as the result of his feeling of solidarity and not because of any external compulsion, captivated my mind" (Meredith 1903: 18).[14] Other anarchists in Nekrovitch's circle include Count Voratin (based on Peter Kropotkin), "a man who had sacrificed wealth and high position and family ties with less fuss than another rich man would make in giving a donation to an hospital. […] I reverenced him as only a youthful disciple can reverence a great leader", and Ivan Kosinski (based on Felix Volkhovsky), "actively engaged in Anarchist propaganda all over Europe. […] In revolutionary circles he was looked up to as an original thinker, and it was rumoured that he played a leading part in most of

[13] For identifications of Meredith's Russian characters with their historical prototype, see Slatter (1999: 40).

[14] Another fictional Russian oppositionist apparently based on Stepniak is Sherpansky in *The Railway Children*, who has been imprisoned, exiled and victimized merely for writing "a beautiful book about poor people" (Nesbit 1995: 79). Nesbit carefully eliminates any suggestion of radicalism on Sherpansky's part. See also p. 174 above.

the revolutionary movements of recent years" (Meredith 1903: 25-26). Kosinski is a "woman-hater", yet this attracts, not repels, Isabel: "the marked indifference to opinion which his bearing indicated, his sincerity, his unmistakable moral courage, perhaps his evident aversion to my sex, all had for me a certain fascination" (Meredith 1903: 26, 29-30). Kosinski is a reverse-image of Peter Ivanovitch in *Under Western Eyes*: the former's misogyny is superficial and conceals an essential humanity – he becomes a benefactor to various "loose women" in and around Tottenham Court Road (Meredith 1903: 225), and secretly nurses a dying female friend in his rooms – while the latter's feminism is hypocritical. Isabel is disillusioned not by these titans of anarchism, but her realization that she cannot reconcile intellectual idealism and emotional or sexual fulfilment. She falls in love with Kosinski but, true to his ideology, he high-mindedly rejects her in favour of revolutionary business in Austria: "An Anarchist's life is not his own. […] Ever since I was fifteen I have lived solely for the Cause […] I thought of you as a comrade, and loved you as such" (Meredith 1903: 268). After this rejection, Isabel is left to contemplate the "futility, not only of Anarchist propaganda but of things in general" (Meredith 1903: 271). As she reviews the anarchist characters of her narrative in its final chapter, her judgments and language become markedly more critical, as she constructs her typology of anarchists and revolutionaries – including the envious, the exploitative, the "noble dreamers", the "cranks", and the criminals – although she is still able to esteem the "fanatics of the Kosinski type" as "stern heroic figures who seem strangely out of place in our humdrum world" (Meredith 1903: 272-74).

Conrad's answer to the Nihilist supermen like Andrey and Kosinski is Victor Haldin. Haldin has the appearance of a hero: he is "lithe and martial" when first seen by Razumov (*UWE* 14), his forehead is "daring" (18), and he resembles "the statue of

a daring youth listening to an inner voice" (63). What is most revealing about Haldin are his dialogues with Razumov in which he sets out his revolutionary programme. He begins by explaining the practical necessity of killing de P–: "He was uprooting the tender plant. He had to be stopped. He was a dangerous man – a convinced man" (16).[15] Haldin suggests that the assassination is a rational response to the state's repression of a revolutionary or liberalizing movement. A similar impression of rational pragmatism is created by Haldin's explanation of his presence in Razumov's room: Razumov appears trustworthy, and has "no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means" (19). Haldin also anticipates Razumov's moral objection to the assassination: "You suppose that I am a terrorist, now – a destructor of what is", which he answers by arguing that "the true destroyers" are the reactionary, repressive forces in the state, the persecutors of human dignity" (19). He describes himself and his fellow revolutionaries as having "made the sacrifice of our lives", but emphasizes both his need to flee in order to continue his work, and the benefit this would have in causing anxiety among the authorities (19-20).

However, Haldin's rational pragmatism suddenly gives way to a utopian mysticism at the point that he asks rhetorically about Razumov's "soul":

> Men like me leave no posterity, but their souls are not lost. No man's soul is ever lost. It works for itself – or else where would be the sense of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith – the labours of the soul? What will become of my soul when I die in the way I must die – soon – very soon perhaps? It shall not perish. Don't make a mistake, Razumov. This is not murder – it is war, war. My spirit shall go on warring in some Russian body till

[15] "Tender plant" is perhaps an allusion to Isaiah 53:2 ("For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground"). Purdy comments that Haldin here imagines himself as the "suffering servant" in Isaiah's prophecy who "will deliver Israel from the Babylonian captivity and restore it to the promised land" (Purdy 1984: 75). However, the "tender plant", in Haldin's mind, is evidently the forces of liberation in Russia, not himself.

> all falsehood is swept out of the world. The modern civilization is false, but a new revelation shall come out of Russia. […] I respect your philosophical scepticism, Razumov, but don't touch the soul. The Russian soul that lives in all of us. It has a future. It has a mission[.] (22)

The religious subtext ("souls", "martyrdom", "faith", "new revelation") is unmistakable, and prompt Razumov to ask Haldin if he believes in God. Haldin's reply – that what is "divine in the Russian soul" is "resignation" – is immediately explained as an extreme form of fatalism: "the necessity of this heavy work came to me" (23), suggesting that he was chosen, presumably by God, to assassinate de P–. The Christ-like associations of Haldin's character are reinforced after Razumov returns from his meeting with Prince K– and General T–: Razumov's "It's done" (55, 64) which he says to Haldin and then to himself echoes Christ's last words on the cross (John 19:30), and Haldin echoes Luke 23:34 when he says: "As to the destroyers of my mere body, I have forgiven them beforehand" (58).[16]

Haldin's increasing Messianism in these two dialogues performs an important ideological function. First impressions suggest he exemplifies Stepniak's heroic Terrorist, like the Nihilist Andrey: a physically impressive being, he has sacrificed his position and comfort to serve the people through an act of necessary violence. The mystical implications of a revolutionary programme that depends on martyrdom – what Stepniak acknowledges at the very end of his novel as the "final victory" which will follow defeats and acts of self-sacrifice (see p. 208 above) – are exposed in Haldin as Messianism, which becomes so unsettling for Razumov that he concludes Haldin must be insane (59). The connection of Haldin's revolutionary utopianism and his

[16] Purdy also detects an allusion to Mark 14:41-42 ("it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners") in Haldin's comment to Razumov, "The time has come to put fate to the test. […] Go with God, thou silent soul" (*UWE* 24, Purdy 1984: 102), despite there being no obvious verbal echoes in Haldin's speech. Purdy misses these other – in my view more obvious – allusions to the Passion in the novel.

Messianic zeal is later reflected in a conversation between the narrator and Miss Haldin, when the former asks if Haldin "believed in the power of a people's will to achieve anything", and Miss Haldin replies: "It was his religion" (133). While this can be read as merely a figure of speech, it reminds us of the irrationality of Haldin's political programme. In Haldin, Conrad provides a critique of revolutionary doctrine by exaggerating the Terrorist hero's optimism and his tendency to self-abnegation to the point that it becomes a deluded mysticism.[17]

Idealistic Heroines

In her transition from idealism to disillusionment, Isabel in *A Girl Among the Anarchists* confronts the inability of some – but, as we have seen, no means all – in her revolutionary circle to live up to her expectations, as well as the impossibility of reconciling her emotional and sexual needs with political activism. Her awakening is explicitly presented as an epiphany in which she finally casts off her juvenile ideals: "What really weighed me down was a sense of the futility, not only of Anarchist propaganda but of things in general" (Meredith 1903: 271). Other fictional heroines in narratives about anarchism also start out as committed idealists in the cause of philosophical anarchism or Nihilism, often expressed in humanitarian terms. However, unlike Isabel, most retain their idealistic commitments and, crucially, are often portrayed as staunch opponents and victims of state oppression. Tania and Zina, Stepniak's heroines in *Career of a Nihilist*, for example – foreshadowed by his portrait

[17] Carabine (1996: 64-96) provides a compelling analysis of the influence on the novel of Apollo Korzeniowski's Polish nationalism, which he diagnoses from "its vatic, ecstatic tone and his Christian metaphors of martyrdom, crucifixion, the grave and resurrection" as "essentially mystical and messianic". Carabine concludes, persuasively, that *Under Western Eyes* is, in part, "an agonized critique of his father's values".

in *Underground Russia* of the female assassins Vera Zasulich and Sophia Perovskaya[18] – are widowed and executed respectively, but their Nihilist ideals remain intact. When Andrey tells her his plan to kill the Tsar, Tania overcomes her shock and resolves "to pluck up all her courage and stand by him in this terrible trial, to support him, and to take upon her young shoulders as much of his burden as she could" (Stepniak 1889: 290). Zina retains not only her ideals but also her beauty: "Beautiful as woman ever was, her head encircled by her hair as by a halo, her face bashfully blushing under the gaze of so many eyes, she cast a kind pitying look over the people below" (Stepniak 1889: 252).

More surprisingly, anarchist heroines appear in the period's popular fiction, including examples by one of its most reactionary practitioners, William Le Queux. In Le Queux's story 'The Secret of a Pair of Gloves' in *The Secrets of the Foreign Office*, for example, Duckworth Drew unwittingly helps the Tsar's niece Marya, an anarchist-terrorist, to assassinate the hated Governor General of Poland, "who, on account of his inhumanity and cruelty towards political suspects, and his autocratic power to send batches of persons to Siberia by administrative process, had been nicknamed by the Revolutionists 'The Wizard of Warsaw'" (Le Queux 1903a: 228). The Russian Empire's oppression of Poland also inspires Wenda Zaluski, a beautiful aristocrat in H. Barton Baker's *Robert Miner, Anarchist* (1902), a *bildungsroman* in which Miner rises from impoverished orphan to ringleader of a plot to kill the Tsar and the Kaiser. Wenda is determined to avenge her nation's treatment by the Russians, a role impressed upon her by her father: "Almost from my cradle he instilled into me a love

[18] Zasulich attempted, unsuccessfully, to assassinate General Fyodor Trepov, Governor of St. Petersburg, in 1878. Trepov, a probable model for General T–, was a military commander in the suppression of the Polish January Uprising in 1863. Perovskaya was involved in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, and refused to flee St. Petersburg when she learnt that her husband, Andrei Zhelyabov, also involved, had been arrested. Both were hanged. See Butterworth 2011: 149-51.

for those principles and a reverence for the Tolstois, the Stepniaks, the Krapotkins, the Marxes, and every other great leader of advanced ideas. Naturally, as a Pole he was the bitter enemy of the tyrant Muscovite, and was at that time one of the leaders of a plot for the execution of the Czar" (Barton Baker 1902: 114). After her father's betrayal to the Russian police, he and Wenda escape, but are located and arrested:

> for months we lived like vermin, until the dogs scented our holes at last. My father was sent to Siberia and I went with him, walking, in one of those terrible chained bands, over hundreds and hundreds of miles of frozen ground and soft snow, our rags pierced by the bitter blasts from the Pole, our shivering bodies scourged by the knout, and fed upon black bread and foul water. Oh the horrors of that awful march! Some died on the road, some went raving mad. Then the mines! For my father, being convicted of the worst of political offences – plotting against the Czar – was sent to the quicksilver mines, that he might rot alive. (114-5)

The knout, and its effect on the body and soul of its often female victims, becomes something of an emblem of Russian tyranny which creates such constant and implacable enemies as Marya and Wenda. Indeed, Griffith's *The Angel of the Revolution* makes this explicit: the base of the "Inner Circle" of an organization known as "The Terrorists" beneath Clapham Common is decorated with paintings showing the effects of Russian tyranny, including "a picture of woman naked to the waist, and tied up to a triangle in a prison yard, being flogged by a soldier with willow wands, while a group of officers stood by, apparently greatly interested in the performance" (Griffith 1998: 30-31).[19] The novel's hero, Richard Arnold, is captivated by the pornographic image – he "stood for several minutes fascinated by the hideous realism

[19] Trotter (1993: 172) highlights the sado-masochism in the novel's treatment of female political prisoners.

of the pictures" and then meets the victim, Radna Michaelis, one of the Inner Circle, who tells him she is "proud of the wounds I have received in the war with tyranny" (Griffith 1998: 38). It is not, however, Radna who is the "angel" of the novel's title. This is Natasha, daughter of the leader of the Terrorists who, from childhood, has embraced the prospect of martyrdom in the cause of freedom: "Ever since she had been old enough to know what tyranny meant, she had been trained to hate it, and prepared to work against it, and, if necessary, to sacrifice herself body and soul to destroy it" (Griffith 1998: 107). She is not an embittered victim, but a visionary idealist: "all night Natasha could hardly sleep for waking dreams of universal empire, and a world at peace equitably ruled by a power that had no need of aggression, because all the realms of earth and air belonged to those who wielded it" (Griffith 1998: 108-09). Another example of the victimized but resolute female anarchist can be found in Max Pemberton's 1908 thriller *Wheels of Anarchy*, the story of a wealthy counter-anarchist, Cavanagh, who is so outraged by the inability of various states to deal with the anarchist threat that he sets up his own group to do the work instead. One of his adversaries is Pauline Mamavieff, who explains that she murdered Cavanagh's father as an act of revenge: "He was the friend of the General who had my father flogged to death" (Pemberton 1908: 136). These heroines combine the idealism of their male counterparts with beauty and often a history of violent victimization, either of themselves or their parents.

There are elements of this type in Conrad's Sophia Antonovna, who tells Razumov her "story" of becoming a "revolutionist": her father died, aged fifty, after a life of toil under rapacious "masters", and, knowing that the Church would merely exhort her to "resignation", she found refuge at the age of sixteen in "the secret societies", experiences that caused her hair to turn white (*UWE* 262-63). However,

there are significant differences, and perhaps the most striking clue to Sophia Antonovna's real significance in the novel are her eyebrows. The narrator repeatedly draws attention to their thinness and blackness: at one point they are described "diverging upwards like the antennae of an insect", and four times the narrator attributes to them a "Mephistophelian" quality (245, 247, 253, 327). This striking epithet associates Sophia Antonovna with the novel's complex and subtle series of allusions to devils that have preoccupied critics and initiated widely divergent readings of the novel's sub-texts;[20] what matters here, however, is that "Mephistophelian" is clearly used by the narrator to unsettle any inclination to view Sophia Antonovna as a heroine. In her dialogue with Razumov in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, the narrator delivers a verdict on her character, derived from Razumov's diary, in which her hair and eyebrows are synecdochically emblematic of the political ethics of the revolutionaries: "She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution" (261). The narrator goes on to specify her as Razumov's "personal adversary", so that deceiving her is equivalent to "flouting in its own words the very spirit of ruthless revolution, embodied in that woman with her white hair and black eyebrows, like slightly sinuous lines of Indian ink, drawn together by the perpendicular folds of a thoughtful frown" (261-62). The narrator comments further when he meets Sophia Antonovna at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, where he has accompanied Miss Haldin to visit Peter Ivanovitch, but here there is a contradiction in the moral significance of her expression:

[20] Critical discussions of the novel's Gothic imagery include Kermode 1982, Hampson 1992, Carabine 1996, Darvay 2009. Kermode's reading of the narrator's role as "diabolical" (153) has prompted particular controversy: Carabine's verdict, for example, is that "Kermode entirely misreads the novel" (Carabine 1996: 243). This controversy has, perhaps, obscured the fact that the novel's diabolical allusions are attributed to several characters, including Razumov – who avoids "a burst of Mephistophelian laughter" when talking to Haldin (99) – and, as we have seen, Mikulin.

> [T]he door was brusquely opened by a short, black-eyed woman in a red blouse, with a great lot of nearly white hair, done up negligently in an untidy and unpicturesque manner. Her thin, jetty eyebrows were drawn together. I learned afterwards with interest that she was the famous – or the notorious – Sophia Antonovna, but I was struck then by the quaint Mephistophelian character of her inquiring glance, because it was so curiously evil-less, so – I may say – un-devilish. It got softened still more as she looked up at Miss Haldin[.] (327)

Describing her glance as both quaintly Mephistophelian and un-devilish suggests that the narrator struggles to make sense of the contradictions in his inferences about her character: she admires Miss Haldin – Sophia Antonovna's brow "completely smoothed out" when she hears the identity of the visitor – yet is an accomplice of Peter Ivanovitch. This suggests that Sophia Antonovna is not simply a villain whose revolutionary ideals are condemned by their demonic associations, but neither, despite her history of suffering, is she an idealistic heroine.

That role belongs to Miss Haldin, although at this point it becomes necessary to distinguish between the character as portrayed in the earlier version of the novel, generally known by its cancelled title of *Razumov*, and the one that appears in the published novel. As Carabine has shown, the *Razumov* typescript depicts, at times, a Natalie who is "indistinguishable from Peter Ivanovitch and her brother" in "her typically Russian messianism, her 'corroding simplicity', and […] her naive espousal of the revolutionary 'cause'" (Carabine 1996: 153). As Moser notes, Conrad's decision to remove Miss Haldin's revolutionary sentiments attracted criticism from Olivia Garnett who, possibly without Conrad's knowledge, had read the *Razumov* typescript, and on reading the published novel, wrote her only known letter to Conrad (Moser 1984: 31). In reply, Conrad wrote: "You are a good critic. That girl does not move.

[…] I need not have made Miss Haldin a mere peg as I am sorry to admit she is" (*CL*4 489-90). Conrad's letter suggests that he had come to see his decision as a possible mistake, but this may be no more than delicacy towards this particular reader, as the evidence of Conrad's revisions shows how careful he was to cancel passages in *Razumov* that had given Natalie more scope.

Far from being a mistake, Conrad's rewriting of her character demonstrates that he deliberately avoided casting Natalie as an idealist-anarchist of the type exemplified by Griffith's Natasha. Conrad preserved one passage of dialogue between Natalie and the narrator that shows her expressing views similar to her brother's revolutionary sentiments. Immediately after her first meeting with Peter Ivanovitch, she tells the narrator: "the will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated […]. That is the true task of real agitators. […] The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform" (133). She speaks these words with a letter from her brother in her hand; she might even be reading from it. Natalie is allowed, therefore, to agree with her brother's ideals at this point in the narrative. However, her point of view is immediately contradicted by the narrator's analysis of the inevitable failure of revolution: "Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured" (135). However, Natalie's response is sufficiently significant for Conrad to have chosen a version of it as the novel's epigraph: "I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread". It is this thought – suggestive of suffering and desperation but not in itself of revolutionary fervour – which introduces her first mention of Razumov's arrival in Geneva, in which she quotes her brother's assessment of him as one of the "[u]nstained, lofty, and solitary existences" (137). Her apparent agreement with Haldin's idealistic programme, therefore, is immediately undermined first by the narrator, and secondly by the novel's dramatic

irony which shows her and her brother's idealistic hopes to be misplaced in Razumov.

Elsewhere, what survives of Natalie's idealism is a more general idealistic hope for mankind – her "invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth" (377) – which is carefully distanced from the acts and theories of the *émigré* revolutionaries. Also, in common with the anarchist heroines of popular fiction, her family has a history of suffering at the hands of the Russian state: her uncle was shot during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (23), and her brother has been executed secretly. Removing most of her revolutionary sentiments enables *Under Western Eyes* to show, more clearly than *Razumov*, Natalie's resistance to Peter Ivanovitch's attempt to seduce her into revolutionary activity – "You must descend into the arena, Natalia" (131) – and her awareness of his hypocritical cruelty towards Tekla: "Miss Haldin's true and delicate humanity had been extremely shocked by the uncongenial fate of her new acquaintance" (161). The result, then, is not so much a "peg" but, rather, a sensitive portrait of a genuine idealist, a humanitarian heroine who returns to Russia not to foment revolution, but to share "her compassionate labours between the horrors of over-crowded jails, and the heartrending misery of bereaved homes" (378). In this novel's ideological scheme, a heroine cannot also be a revolutionary.

Fashionable Revolutionaries

The Victorian 'dynamite novel' tended to portray anarchists and revolutionaries as violent but sincere, with one notable exception. James's *The Princess Casamassima* is a particularly literary manifestation of the cultural fascination with revolutionaries in the period, a subtle dissection of class and aesthetics, in which representatives of every level of society appear to suffer from a

restless dissatisfaction with the aesthetic and political values of their fellows. The upper-class characters, such as the Princess, Captain Sholto, and Lady Aurora, yearn for the company of their social inferiors and condemn their own class backgrounds; the hero, the orphaned book-binder Hyacinth Robinson, espouses revolutionary sentiments but nonetheless is captivated by the glamour and aesthetic values of his high-society acquaintances, whom he desires to join. James's novel dissects rather than satirizes the revolutionaries, but, in the Edwardian decade, a more satirical mode of writing about violent extremism developed. The most celebrated example is G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), a combination of satire and religious allegory in which the six anarchists working for the Central Anarchist Council headed by Sunday are shown, one-by-one, to be detectives, and at the story's climax, Sunday is revealed to be God. When he infiltrates the Council's meeting in a Leicester Square hotel as Thursday, the story's hero, Gabriel Syme, notes that each anarchist "looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved mirror" (Chesterton 1936: 260). Only the aristocratic Wednesday, the Marquis de St. Eustache, wears his "fashionable clothes as if they were really his own" (260-61): Dr Bull, for example, also known as Saturday, is described patronisingly as an *arriviste*, with "that combination of *savoir-faire* with a sort of well-groomed coarseness which is not uncommon in young doctors" (262). The ironic humour of the scene derives in part from the anomaly of an apparently sincere discussion of a plan to assassinate both the French President and the Tsar in Paris by a group of fashionably attired grotesques, in front of waiters and over a sumptuous feast (267-68). Chesterton's satire might itself be described as 'anarchic': subtitled *A Nightmare*, the narrative refuses to allow the reader to settle on a stable interpretation of the characters and the story's true significance; nevertheless, we can safely conclude that all of its characters are playing

the role of anarchists, and none is sincere.

Barton Baker's *Robert Miner, Anarchist* sets its satirical commentary in a more realistic setting, contrasting two kinds of anarchists. A chapter entitled 'Fashionable Anarchists' contrasts the topographical domains of 'conventional' anarchism, "usually associated in our minds with frowsy clubs in the neighbourhood of Fitzroy Square, with cheap restaurants behind Leicester Square, with secret dens in Soho – to which admission can be gained only by a pass-word, and with squalid public-houses in the East End of London", with 'society' anarchism:

> [T]he regenerators of the world number among their members men and women of wealth and position. Socialism and its sequel, anarchism, have all the charm of paradox for these, and as there is no fear of their theories being reduced to practice, and as their inconsistencies render them notorious and much talked about, there is in such vagaries something of the excitement of playing with fire in the neighbourhood of a powder magazine. (Barton Baker 1902: 85-86)

These 'fashionable anarchists' are "wealthy and luxurious theorists", who invite to their homes revolutionaries ranging "from the mildest dilettante socialist to the most dangerous anarchist" to hold meetings among "velvet-pile carpets and satin couches, with liveried flunkies to wait upon them" (85-86). For them, anarchism is something between a theory, a game, and a diversion. The "Babel of tongues" of foreign anarchists – "fierce disputes between the moderates and the extremes" in which "the vilest epithets are cast upon every crowned head", and "the most horrible blasphemy upon religion" is expressed – is turned into spectacle for the education of the anarchists' wealthy society patrons:

> The fine gentlemen listen to all this with silent approval, occasionally join the discussion, and are treated with undisguised contempt by the arguers; or they

> start ingenious paradoxes and theories among themselves. Not a smile, not a genial expression, can be discovered upon any face, the sneer alone differentiates fanatical gloom and fierce hatred. The host is delighted; here is the ideal of that freedom of speech which to the venom-laden democrat is the most prized of all privileges. (87)

Conrad's version of the fashionable anarchist is the Lady Amateur in 'The Informer'. Her resemblance to the Rossetti sisters has been explored productively by Sherry (1971: 211-15), Hampson (2005), and others, and the links between Conrad's story and *A Girl Among the Anarchists* are strong. The Lady Amateur not only resembles the Rossettis' narrator, Isabel, but also exemplifies the wealthy, upper-class, insincere amateur, like James's Princess and the gentleman anarchists of Chesterton's and Barton Baker's satirical passages. The daughter of "a distinguished government official", she and her brother have the run of their father's house in Hermione Street, which she then puts to the service of her revolutionary friends.[21] Mr X's narration emphasizes repeatedly her insincerity: she has the "appearance of enthusiasm, of independence, of courageous thought", which she puts on in the same way that she puts on her distinctively "picturesque" clothes, and for the same reason – "to assert her individuality at any cost" (*SS* 80-81). Even before her revolutionary sympathies are discussed, then, Mr X has made it clear that she is a dilettante, who adopts ideas in order to create and then project a personality. Moreover, her "revolutionary convictions" are expressed through "gestures" –the title that Conrad preferred for the story (see p. 25 above) – "gestures of pity, of anger, of indignation against the anti-humanitarian vices of the social class to which she belonged herself" (*SS* 81). Compared to Barton Baker's fashionable anarchists, she is less a spectator and more of

[21] William Michael Rossetti, Helen and Olivia's father, was, in addition to being one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a senior official in the Inland Revenue. According to Helen Rossetti, Conrad visited him at his home to discuss *Nostromo* (Sherry 1971: 213).

an actor (one of several characters in the story who choose or are forced to play a role). James's Princess Casamassima is similarly unfulfilled spiritually, an aristocratic trifler whose indulgence of revolutionaries is exposed as a voyeuristic entertainment: despite being captivated by her glamour, Hyacinth recognizes that her interest is "capricious […] a noble and interesting whim" (H. James 1977: 214); she invites him to a country house in order to enjoy a vicarious pleasure from his revolutionary activities. Like the Lady Amateur, the Princess is also an actor as well as a voyeur in the entertainment: when Hyacinth Robinson has an audience with her at her house in Mayfair, he has the same feeling "with which, at the theatre, he had sometimes awaited the entrance of a celebrated actress. In this case the actress was to perform for him alone" (208). In these narratives by James, Barton Baker, and Conrad, the adoption of revolutionary rhetoric by the wealthy or aristocratic is represented as a rebellion against their class that is voyeuristic, insincere, and ultimately falls short of the commitment of action.

Propagandists of the Word

The anarchist guests in the society drawing rooms they proclaim to despise in *Robert Miner, Anarchist* engage in propaganda of the word, not the deed: "there is no fear of their theories being reduced to practice" (Barton Baker 1902: 85-86). The anarchist as rhetorician, treated in the period's fiction with varying degrees of sympathy and scorn, receives its fullest presentation in *A Girl Among the Anarchists*. The Rossettis' anarchists form a community centred on the production of printed propaganda: "the headquarters of the *Tocsin*, besides being a printing and publishing office, rapidly became a factory, a debating club, a school, a hospital, a mad-house, a soup-kitchen and a sort of Rowton House all in one" (Meredith 1903: 133).[22] This

[22] Rowton Houses were hostels funded by the Victorian philanthropist Montagu Corry (Lord Rowton).

diverse and shifting community includes committed revolutionaries such as Kosinski and various orators, both sincere and self-serving. Among the latter is the *Tocsin*'s compositor, Short, who, like Barton Baker's foreign anarchists patronized by the gentility, is prepared to exploit the resources of his revolutionary colleagues, and whose conduct is at odds with his humanitarian rhetoric:

> I soon realised the two dominant characteristics which had made of him a Socialist – envy and sloth. So deeply was he imbued with envy that he was quite unable to rest so long as anyone else was better off than himself; and although he did not care one jot for "humanity" of which he prated so freely, and was incapable of regenerating a flea, he found in a certain section of the Socialist and Anarchist party that degree of dissatisfaction and covetousness which appealed to his degraded soul. Besides which the movement afforded him grand opportunities for living in sloth and sponging on other people. (134)

The Rossettis' account is, then, a balanced one that has space for 'good' and 'bad' anarchists, the latter being attracted to anarchism as an opportunity to exploit others and to legitimize through political rhetoric their envy and covetousness. Elsewhere, anarchists who use the façade of anarchism to conceal their exploitation of others for personal gain include three of the four-strong anarchist gang in Coulson Kernahan's *The Red Peril* (1908) who "have only one object – to get money", for themselves, not for their cause (Kernahan 1908: 102). This is clearly a general failing of those who purport to be anarchists in this novel. In order to infiltrate London's anarchist milieu, the novel's hero, Montgomery Stanton, frequents a café where "political refugees of every creed and all nationalities forgather"; here, he says, "I posed as an anarchist, and did my best to ingratiate myself with the shabby, not to say shady-looking foreigners who frequent the place" (Kernahan 1908: 102), which he achieves by allowing himself to be exploited financially by them. Another anarchist who produces only speech, but

whose conduct is not so much exploitative as shallowly entertaining, is Lucian Gregory, the anarchist-poet in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Until his eloquence fails him when making his case for election to the vacant post of Thursday in the Central Anarchist Council, Gregory is an exemplar of the superficial rhetorician who succeeds only in turning anarchist ideology into aesthetic spectacle: "Mr Lucian Gregory, the red-haired poet, was really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one only laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure" (Chesterton 1936: 207).

Underlying these fictional presentations is of course a real debate, the dichotomy of 'propaganda of the word' versus 'propaganda of the deed', the respective merits of which were discussed in revolutionary literature from the 1870s onwards (Butterworth 2011: 123-36). The period's fiction almost always presented propagandists as insincere, exploitative, or both: only the Rossettis' novel makes any attempt to treat seriously the merits of the genuine debate over propaganda of word and deed. The propagandizing anarchists of *The Secret Agent* – Michaelis, Ossipon, and Yundt – are therefore representatives of a literary tradition that satirized propagandists by making their personal conduct an index to their sincerity. As Sherry has noted, each is individually characterized and delineated but they share, to varying degrees, a tendency to sloth and exploitation (Sherry 1971: 249). They exploit, particularly, women, a point that Verloc meditates upon in his "moral reflections" on the "lazy lot" who meet at his home: Yundt is being "nursed by a blear-eyed old woman" whom he "enticed away from a friend"; Michaelis has been "annexed by his wealthy old lady", the Lady Patroness, who provides for him a country cottage so he "could moon about the shady lanes for days together in a delicious and humanitarian

idleness"; Ossipon financially exploits the "silly girls with savings bank books" whom he seduces (*SA* 45).

Their most trenchant critic is the Professor, who does not see much of a distinction between the individual propagandists of the International Red Committee: "Here you talk, print, plot, and do nothing" (*SA* 60). The Professor's scorn develops into an ethical argument about words and deeds. During his dialogue with Ossipon in the Silenus Restaurant, the Professor posits a dichotomy of words and "social convention", exemplified by the Committee's approach, on the one hand, and, on the other, "conclusive" thought and action, and "the disintegration of old morality" (60), which is the Professor's genuinely radical position. In the Professor's argument, the Committee members are participants in a "game" which is played between "[r]evolution" and "legality": as in all games, there are pre-determined rules – conventions – and the opposing forces are not, as they themselves might imagine, genuine enemies, but rather players who are "at bottom identical" (58). Furthermore, by basing their plans for the future and "reveries of economical systems" on "what is", the propagandists support that status quo – which, the Professor explains, is "the superstition and worship of legality" (60-61). Their discursive methods – "paper and ink" has neither "built up" the "condemned social order" nor "will ever put an end to it" (59) – cannot, therefore, be anything but ineffective. Furthermore, their conventional thinking means their words are empty: "what you say means nothing. You are the worthy delegates for revolutionary propaganda, but the trouble is not only that you are as unable to think independently as any respectable grocer or journalist of them all, but that you have no character whatever" (57). This absence of meaning makes Yundt "a posturing shadow", and the Professor's implication is that all three anarchists are insubstantial pretenders.

The Professor's ferocious attack on 'conventional' anarchism is endorsed by the novel's presentation of the three propagandists: all are shown to be producers of empty words when they meet in Verloc's parlour in Chapter 3. Michaelis delivers a "tirade" in which he communicates with no-one but himself: he is "indifferent to the sympathy or hostility of his hearers, indifferent indeed to their presence, from the habit he had acquired of thinking aloud […] in a mental solitude more barren than a waterless desert" (39-40). His words are the product of sterile conditions and have no addressee, while the substance of his theory is ironically undermined by a comparison to a revealed religion: it is "the confession of his faith", implying also that the theory of this "apostle" is a creed. Yundt, whose designation as "terrorist" appears increasingly ironic as the novel progresses, uses fiercer rhetoric so that the gap between speech and substance is more stark:

> There was an extraordinary force of suggestion in this posturing. The all but moribund veteran of dynamite wars had been a great actor in his time – actor on platforms, in secret assemblies, in private interviews. The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice. He was no man of action; he was not even an orator of torrential eloquence, sweeping the masses along in the rushing noise and foam of a great enthusiasm. (42)

Ossipon's ideas are second-hand pseudo-science that he also treats as religious truths: Lombroso is a "saint", and Yundt's rejection of Lombroso as "an ass" shocks Ossipon as "blasphemy". He is known as "the Doctor" but is an "ex-medical student without a degree", the author of a "quasi-medical study", 'The Corroding Vices of the Middle Classes', which has been confiscated by the police, suggesting that its content was more titillating than scientific (40-41). The bickering of the three emphasizes their

political impotence, and it is one of the novel's ironies that the indolent Verloc, driven by self-interest and fear, is the only one amongst them capable of action. The satire is also effected by a grotesque physicality: Michaelis is obese, Yundt skeletal, and Ossipon has a "negro type" of face in an ironically undermining allusion to his belief in Lombroso's criminal anthropology. In addition, they are marked by a foreign 'otherness' that is implied both by their names and by the Professor's scornful reference to their perception of Britain as "our only refuge" (60).

This implication of foreignness is another point that *The Secret Agent*'s anarchists have in common with their analogues in popular fiction, which strongly associated 'conventional' anarchism with European migrant communities in particular districts of London (usually Whitechapel or Soho). The association of anarchism and immigration was a particularly topical concern in the second half of the Edwardian decade: the Aliens Act (1905), which provided powers of exclusion and deportation, but also an appeals procedure and preserved the right of asylum, was "the first modern act to regulate alien immigration into Britain" (Pellew 1989: 369). It was the result of decades of debate over immigration, particularly Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the East End (Glover 1997: 24-29, Gainer 1972: 191).[23] The Assistant Commissioner's concern that "hasty legislation" may result from agent provocateur activity can therefore be seen as a contemporary reference (108), and the debate over immigration included commentary in magazines that Conrad read and which published his work. An article in the February 1901 issue of *Blackwood's Magazine*, 'Foreign

[23] Concern about the relationship between immigration policy and anarchist threat remained controversial in the period. On the day of the Greenwich Bombing in 1894, Howard Vincent who, after retiring from the police served as an MP from 1885 until his death in 1908, questioned the Home Secretary, H.H. Asquith, about the foreign anarchist threat. Asquith's declaration against powers of expulsion prompted an adverse reaction from the Conservative press (Burgoyne 2007: 160). Vincent went on to lead the British delegation to the International Anti-Anarchist Conference in Rome in 1898 – presumably the model for the Milan Conference mentioned by Vladimir (*SA* 25; see Glover 1997: 22-33) – and chaired a Parliamentary investigation into immigration in 1901.

Undesirables', for example, describes Jewish immigration to a London in the process of being "Judaised" as an "invasion": "the alien terror, even though it has been much exaggerated, is something of a reality" (Kestner 2000: 281). When Conrad was writing *The Secret Agent*, he was also publishing some of the essays which later became collected as *The Mirror of the Sea*. One of these, 'London's River', was published in the *London Magazine* in July 1906 in the same number as W. James Wintle's article, 'Haunts of Our Alien Invaders'. The title leaves the reader in no doubt of the article's attitude towards immigration, which, Wintle argues, threatens Britain's social cohesion, commercial prosperity, and domestic security:

> If our foreign guests were wholly or in the main prosperous merchants, friendly neighbours, and reputable individuals, their presence might be regarded as a fairly unmixed blessing; but if, on the other hand, a large proportion of them consists of the outcasts and the offscourings of other nations, of keen rivals determined to undersell and to crush the home producer, of dangerous characters who have found other countries too hot to hold them, and of failures and ne'er-do-wells unable to gain a living in their own country, then we reach a point where hospitality degenerates into sheer folly and indifference becomes near akin to crime. (Wintle 1906: 535)

In this article, immigration is examined topographically, with Wintle asserting that "in certain limited areas" of Soho and elsewhere, the proportion of "foreigners" may be "as high as eighty and ninety per cent" (536). The article associates immigrants in those locations with anarchism, with one section of the article devoted to 'Foreign Restaurants and Anarchist Clubs in Soho',[24] in which Wintle describes Soho as "the

[24] The article also offers a curious elision of foreign subversion and foreign food in Soho, a connection which can be found in some of the period's genre fiction, and which is echoed in *The Secret Agent* by the Assistant Commissioner's visit to the Italian restaurant. Wintle writes, "Soho is the headquarters of the foreign waiter and restaurateur, who is generally of French, Swiss, or Italian origin. There are some 27,000 foreigners of these three nationalities resident in London, and over 8,000 of them are engaged

gathering point of the most doubtful type of alien immigrant" where "[m]ore than one Royal assassination has been planned in its quiet restaurants" alongside more routine criminality such as burglary, safe-breaking, and knifings.

Evidence that popular and literary culture engaged in the contemporary debate over immigration is especially clear in *The Four Just Men*, a text that places anti-immigration legislation at the centre of its narrative. The objective of the Four Just Men's plot to assassinate the British Foreign Secretary is to defeat his Aliens Extradition (Political Offences) Bill which, they declare, "is calculated to hand over to a corrupt and vengeful Government men who now in England find an asylum from the persecutions of despots and tyrants." These political asylum seekers are radical, foreign, but – contrary to Wintle's view of the foreign plotter – quiescent, a view implicitly validated by Superintendent Falmouth's failure to locate the Four Just Men amongst them. Falmouth tells the Assistant Commissioner that he does not know the nationality or ethnicity of the Four Just Men – "they might be chinamen or niggers" – before revealing that his men have "pulled in all the suspicious characters we know" in Little Italy, Bloomsbury, Soho, and even Nunhead: "a lot of Armenians live down there" (Wallace 1995: 22). Evidently, these "characters" may be "suspicious" but they are not a source of threat in the narrative. A similar view emerges from B. Fletcher Robinson's 'The Story of Amaroff the Pole', in which the police detective Addington Peace describes the London of refugees and asylum-seekers as a "queer place" but nevertheless one which remains largely undisturbed because, not in spite of, Britain's tradition of tolerance:

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either as waiters, cooks, or employees in hotels, restaurants, and private houses." Foreign waiters were seen by popular fiction writers as particular threatening, as in E. Phillips Oppenheim's *The Secret* (1908: 249), in which the German Waiters' Union at 13 Old Compton Street is the coordination point for an extensive network of "nearly 200,000" German agents. As war with Germany approached, spotting the German waiter (or barber) who was really a German spy became something of a national obsession. See Stafford 1989: 8.

> There are foreign colonies, with their own religions and clubs and politics, working their way through life just as if they were in Odessa or Hamburg or Milan. There are refugees – Heaven knows how many, for we do not – that have fled before all the despotisms that succeeded and all the revolutions that failed from Siam to the Argentine. Tolstoi fanatics, dishonest presidents, anarchists, royalists, Armenians, Turks, Carlists, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia – a finer collection than even America itself can show. On the Continent – well, we should be running them in, and they would be throwing bombs. But here no one troubles them as long as they pay rent and taxes, and keep their hands out of each other's pockets or from each other's throats. They understand us, too, and stop playing at assassins and conspirators. But once in a while habit is too strong for them, and something happens. (Fletcher Robinson 1905: 17-18)

In this passage, it is clear that the anarchists' potential threat justifies monitoring them, but the threat rarely becomes actual, precisely because of Britain's liberal, tolerant traditions. Although, as I will show shortly, there are counter-examples, these examples show that popular culture could remain surprisingly sceptical about the alarmist messages about immigration that characterized some journalistic and political discourse at the time.

It is this liberal view of the immigration debate that *The Secret Agent* affirms. Satirized though they clearly are, the novel's sham propagandists are not a source of threat, and Ossipon recognizes the importance of keeping to the right side of the law: "Under the present circumstances it's nothing short of criminal" he tells the Professor, referring to the Greenwich Park bombing. He continues: "this business may affect our position very adversely in this country" (59). Heat's view is more self-serving, especially with regard to Michaelis whom he is determined to blame for the bombing, but even he recognizes that the anarchists in his "flock" are incapable of action: "Not

one of them had half the spunk of this or that burglar he had known" (78). Conrad's novel, therefore, takes a political, and – in the light of the Aliens Act, a highly topical – stance on immigration, supporting those who argued for maintaining British traditions of 'liberty', including the right of asylum, against those, including his fellow-contributors to *Blackwood's* and the *London Magazine*, who asserted that Britain's economic and security interests demanded a new and more exclusive approach.

Despite the clear political implications of his novel, Conrad disclaimed any ambition of serious political analysis in three letters; the first two, to Galsworthy (12 September 1906) and the novel's eventual publisher Algernon Methuen (7 November 1906), were written during the novel's first phase of composition for its serial publication, and the third, to Cunninghame Graham (7 October 1907), followed its publication in book form. To Galsworthy he wrote: "In such a tale one is likely to be misunderstood. After all you must not take it too seriously. The whole thing is superficial and it is but *a tale*. I had no idea to consider Anarchism politically – or to treat it in its philosophical aspect: as a manifestation of human nature in its discontent and imbecility" (*CL*3 354). To Methuen he wrote: "It has no social or philosophical intention" (*CL*3 371), and to Cunninghame Graham he wrote: "But I don't think that I've been satirizing the revolutionary world. All these people are not revolutionaries – they are shams" (*CL*3 491). Conrad suggests that his interest is not politics but the use of technique to produce an aesthetic effect: the letter to Cunninghame Graham describes the novel as "a sustained effort in ironical treatment of a melodramatic subject". On one level, the novel bears out Conrad's assertions. There is no attempt to analyse Michaelis's "tirade" or engage with Yundt's "historic attitude of defiance" (42). We are left with revolutionary rhetoric – such as Michaelis's "History is

dominated and determined by the tool and the production – by the force of economic conditions" – which is ironized but not examined (37). At the same time, the novel's indifference to the political substance of anarchist philosophy, and the scornful, ironic treatment of its followers, implies an ideological position that anarchism is, philosophically and practically, a dead-end, whilst also lacking the political and terrorist threat claimed by alarmist rhetoric.

Anarchist-Terrorists

In the light of 'The Informer' and *The Secret Agent*, it is tempting to read the anarchist revolutionaries of *Under Western Eyes* as further examples of revolutionary shams. They certainly share with Ossipon, Michaelis, and Yundt the quality of discordant, grotesque, or ridiculous physicality. Peter Ivanovitch's booming voice, his bulk, his hair – Razumov describes him as "that hairy and obscene brute" (224) – and his dark spectacles are frequently emphasized as adjuncts of his revolutionary feminism. Madame de S— is portrayed as a gothic character, resembling Dickens's Mrs Skewton in *Dombey and Son* (1848) and the similarly gothic Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1861): Madame de S— has also been "shamefully robbed, positively ruined" (221) by a man, in her case a Grand Duke who presumably jilted her after obtaining her money. Razumov imagines her as a revived corpse, a mummy, a ghoul, an automaton or wooden doll, and a witch, and (like Mrs Skewton) she appears to fragment into an array of artificial body-parts: she is a "painted, shiny-eyed harridan", a "witch in Parisian clothes […] with a smile which made him think of a grinning skull"; "her rigidity was frightful, like the rigour of a corpse galvanized into

harsh speech and glittering stare by the force of murderous hate" (220).[25] Nikita's presence is indicated synecdochically by his "squeaky voice" (338-41); like Michaelis, he is obese, and the narrator alludes subtly to *Richard III* (I.i.23) – "dogs bark at me as I halt by them" – to suggest deformity and villainy when describing him as "that creature, so grotesque as to set town dogs barking at its mere sight". Julius Laspara looks "absurdly like a hook-nosed boy with a beautiful false pepper-and-salt beard" (307); he is miniscule and delicate – he gets down from his stool "as though he had descended from the heights of Olympus", and is dwarfed by his daughters and his furniture – yet he is also "pedantic and ferocious" (275). Where they differ from *The Secret Agent*'s anarchists, however, is in their capacity for action: they are engaged in a genuine conspiracy, a point that the narrative carefully obscures then subtly reveals.

The conspiracy is evidently being plotted on the "day of many conversations" (237) in Part Third that begins with Razumov's encounter with Peter Ivanovitch at the Chateau Borel, and continues through his audience with Madame de S— and a further conversation with Peter Ivanovitch; Razumov leaves the Chateau but meets Sophia Antonovna in its grounds, where he also glimpses Yakovlitch, "the veteran of ancient terrorist campaigns" (330) who has arrived from the US, and one unnamed other; Razumov and Sophia Antonovna are then joined by Nikita and another unnamed anarchist; finally, having finally departed, Razumov meets Julius Laspara who is approaching the Chateau. All are converging for what is clearly a highly significant event, the true meaning of which only becomes apparent to the reader in Part Fourth when Natalie and the narrator visit the Hotel Cosmopolitan to speak to Peter

[25] Cf. Dickens's description of Mrs Skewton who, like Madame de S—, is frequently depicted reclining on a sofa, as a "painted object", as "cadaverous", and, after her paralysis, "like a horrid doll that had tumbled down" (Dickens 1984: 472, 513, 613). For Dickens's imaginative obsession with corpses and effigies, animated or otherwise – an obsession that clearly left its mark on Conrad – see Carey (1991:80-104).

Ivanovitch, and see instead several of the revolutionaries with Laspara poring over "a map of the Baltic provinces" (329). Reviewing the scene in hindsight, the narrator realizes that this was explained by a subsequent "abortive military conspiracy in Russia" in which "the revolutionary parties abroad had given their assistance […] to dispatch a steamer with a cargo of arms and conspirators to invade the Baltic provinces" (330). This is an allusion to a real, failed plot which took place in 1905 after the January Revolution in which the SS *John Grafton* brought weapons, explosives and ammunition from Britain to Finland to supply separatists in Finland and revolutionaries in St Petersburg. Conrad would have read about the affair in 'The Azeff Scandal' (Soskice 1909: 822) if he was not already aware of it (for example via Hueffer, as Soskice claims that Gapon was a leading figure in the conspiracy).[26]

Under Western Eyes therefore reveals its anarchists to be a group of genuine revolutionaries plotting the overthrow of the Tsarist state with weapons and men. There are apparent precedents for such revolutionaries in popular fiction. Coulson Kernahan's *Captain Shannon* (1897), for example, capitalizes on both the Fenian bombings of the 1880s and more recent anarchist assassinations by imagining a terrorist Federation of anarchist, Nihilist, and Irish republican organizations, with two objectives: "at the last meeting of the World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom it was unanimously agreed to inaugurate the great struggle for personal liberty, firstly, by emancipating Ireland from the English yoke, and secondly, by the overthrowing of Imperialism in Russia" (Kernahan 1897: 11). In *Robert Miner, Anarchist*, Miner's group plotting to assassinate the Tsar and the Kaiser comprises desperate, foreign revolutionaries, differentiated from the Nihilist heroes and sham propagandists by their seriousness of purpose and commitment to means not ends, as

[26] See pp. 189-91 above.

well as by their bodily hygiene:

> There were no *dilettante* socialists here, only those who threw off all restraints, survivals of the bestial stage of humanity, and the whole air was faint with the sickening odour of this unclean mass and their garlic-tainted breaths. You looked around in vain for some expression, spoken or unspoken, of nobly conceived, even if mistaken, purpose, some indication that this ferocity was only a terrible means to an heroic end, that these people would use the knife as surgeons do to destroy what is diseased. No, it would be only blood for blood's sake, lust for murder, wolfish greed for other men's goods, they would rend and destroy all that was against them, all that was not with them, celebrate their orgie [*sic*] among mangled corpses and the ruin of the world, and then, like beasts of prey, tear each other to pieces over the division of the spoil. (Barton Baker 1902: 156-57)

Another example is the group known as the Terrorists in Griffiths's *The Angel of the Revolution*, who claim their assassinations by inscribing the letter 'T' into the forehead of their victims – like Conrad's Nikita who marks "his handiwork" by pinning to his victims a paper with the letters 'N.N.' – "the very pseudonym of murder" (266).

However, the similarities between the anarchist-terrorists of *Under Western Eyes* and these examples from popular fiction are mainly superficial. Terrorist organizations in the latter are often fantastically large, powerful, and effective, in contrast with the revolutionaries of *Under Western Eyes*, who may be grotesque but their plots are grounded in real events, are compromised by human weaknesses (such as Nikita's treachery), and end in failure. The Terrorists in *The Angel of the Revolution*, for example, initially appear to be a secret society of assassins, but are eventually revealed to comprise twelve million men, sufficient to achieve the organization's objective of bringing about a new world order via a revolution in the United States, the defeat of Russia in war and the subsequent exiling of the Tsar to

Siberia, the re-conquest of Turkey, and the world-wide abolition of armies, navies, and land-tenure. Captain Shannon's World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom is barely less ambitious:

> the most gigantic and far-reaching organization which has been formed within the history of man; an organization, the wealth and power of which are practically unlimited; which counts among its members statesmen in every Court in Europe – statesmen who, although they hold the highest offices of trust in their country's councils, are secretly working in connection with the Federation; an organisation which has spies and eyes in every place, and will spare neither man, woman nor child in the terrible vengeance which will be visited upon its enemies. (Kernahan 1897: 16)

A rare example of a genuinely revolutionary organization that is realistically presented is the 'Odds and Evens' in Arthur R. and Mary E. Ropes's *On Peter's Island*. The organization's meetings are bureaucratic, with minutes being taken and points of order being made: "for the members were most particular to observe their rules with absolute exactness; and some of them would have turned away from the finest opportunity of exploding the Winter Palace, if the plan for the mine had not been duly passed by their engineering sub-committee" (Ropes and Ropes 1901: 79).

A different kind of contrast is provided by *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, which does not attempt to represent a terrorist organization, but in keeping with its sympathy towards revolutionary doctrine, does attempt to explain terrorist phenomena, suggesting that some terrorists are motivated by personal or collective grievances, and others by ideology:

> Very diverse in nature were the motives which prompted the committal of these acts of violence – these assassinations and dynamite explosions – in different men. With some it was an act of personal revolt, the outcome of personal

> sufferings and wrongs endured by the rebel himself, by his family or his class. In others violence was rather the offspring of ideas, the logical result of speculation upon the social evil and the causes thereof. (Meredith 1903: 188)

Realistic terrorist organizations, then, are evident only rarely in the 'dynamite novel' and its Edwardian successors, which are usually more inclined to what Ó Donghaile calls "the flashy exploitation of political violence" (Ó Donghaile 2011: 15). One factor that above all enables the anarchist group to become the global revolutionary, using violence to bring about apocalyptic or utopian ends, is technology, which accounts for the prevalence of the final fictional anarchist sub-type: the Promethean technologist.

Promethean Technologists

The Secret Agent's trio of anarchist "shams", caught up in empty expressions of ideology and supported through the exploitation of others, contrasts with the Professor, who demonstrates 'Promethean' qualities.[27] Conrad himself recognized the Professor's fundamental difference from the novel's other anarchists, as he pointed out to Cunninghame Graham (7 October 1907): while the others are "shams", he says he did not intend to make the Professor "despicable". He continues: "He is incorruptible at any rate. […] I wanted to give him a note of perfect sincerity. At the worst he is a megalomaniac of an extreme type" (*CL*3 491). The Professor is, though, a type recognizable also in the period's popular fiction. David Trotter has observed that the Professor "ought to be unique, a reproof to literary as well as social convention. And yet there were equivalents in popular fiction. Dr Andrew Fernandez, for example, in Hume Nisbet's *The Great Secret* (1895), whose gang hijacks a cruise liner, has all the

[27] I am indebted to David Mulry for this label, and for his analysis of the 'dynamite novel' that suggests the persistence of characters whose anarchistic power derives from their "Promethean" technological discoveries (unpublished paper given at the Joseph Conrad Society (UK) International Conference, July 2011).

Professor's charismatic inhumanity, with some to spare" (Trotter 1993: 255).[28] These equivalents, often fantastic or even super-human, have several distinctive traits. First, they are not understood by or even known to the authorities. Otto Kampf, the "Red Priest" in William Le Queux's fictional answer to the January 1905 Russian Revolution, *The Czar's Spy* (1905), is a fictional version of Gapon (see pp. 189-91 above), described by David Soskice as "the famous 'revolutionary pope'" who led "the people of St Petersburg […] to the Winter Palace to present their monster petition for mercy to the Tsar" (821). Despite his origin in these real events of failed revolution, Kampf is a Nihilist mastermind who overmatches the vast resources of the autocratic, Tsarist state:

> Who in Russia had not heard of that mysterious unknown person who had directed a hundred conspiracies against the Imperial Autocrat, and yet the identity of whom the police had always failed to discover? It was believed that Kampf had once been professor of chemistry at Moscow University, and that he had invented the most terrible and destructive explosive used by the revolutionists. […] The Emperor, the ministers, the police and the bureaucrats knew this, yet they were powerless – they knew that the mysterious professor who had disappeared from Moscow fifteen years before and had never since been seen was only waiting his opportunity to strike a blow that would stagger and crush the Empire from end to end – yet of his whereabouts they were in utter ignorance. (Le Queux 1905: 307-08)

Wallace's Four Just Men are even more extraordinary in their ability not only to evade the authorities but also to operate under their noses. Only Thery, the criminal they take on to complete their number, has a police record, and the other three, Poiccart,

[28] Fernandez is "an enthusiast and poet in the art of murder and destruction" who "felt Jove-like with his infernal knowledge and power" (Nisbet 1895: 73-74). However he is ultimately shipwrecked, resorts to cannibalism, and is finally eaten by sharks.

Gonsalez, and Manfred, keep their identities secret despite being the objects of an international man-hunt; they operate unnoticed in Parliament, Downing Street, and the office of a national newspaper. Likewise, Conrad's Professor is largely unknown to, and certainly not understood by, the authorities. Heat knows him by sight, but not by name, and despite being the "principal expert in anarchist procedure" (69), Heat is unable to understand this "perfect anarchist": in their encounter near Tottenham Court Road, Heat reflects on "the world of thieves" and "what is normal in the constitution of society" (75) as a refuge from the inexplicable phenomenon which confronts him.

Secondly, these Promethean anarchists are technologists who are engaged in a quest for, or have already discovered, some transformative secret. The Professor has not yet conquered the secret of the "perfect detonator" for which he strives, but other scientist-anarchists, such as Kampf, have made their breakthroughs which allow them to threaten or sometimes carry out destruction on a large scale in order to reform society on utopian lines. This is a common trope in the dynamite novel. As Alex Houen has observed, popular fiction "invariably yoked Anarchist militants and dangerous scientists together", noting that as well as writing a 'dynamite novel', *For Mamie's Sake*, Grant Allen also wrote an amateur book on physics, *Force and Energy: A Theory of Dynamics* (1888) (Houen 2002: 31). Allen's novel imagines an anacoustic explosive created by an apolitical scientist, Sidney Chevenix, assisted by a Polish Nihilist, Stanislas Benyowski, the novel's anarchist-technologist. Benyowski tells Chevenix that the objective of their work should be a utopian transformation: "You forget that while you men of science regard all this as an end in itself, to us men of politics it is not an end, but a means only. The true end is the final regeneration of human society" (Allen 1886: 25-26). In *The Angel of the Revolution* (1893), the Terrorists recruit an inventor, Richard Arnold, to provide them with the means to

effect a world revolution; Arnold shuts himself away "for three or four hours experimenting with explosives of various kinds" (Griffith 1998: 259). Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist* has as its title character an engineer who uses his technical skills to become "the destined destroyer of civilization!" (1893: 65), inventing a super-lightweight metal from which he and his accomplices construct an *aëronef* to bombard London and other cities. Hartmann intends "to wreck civilization" and, with his band of "Rousseaus", install an anarchist utopia by returning the world to "a simpler life": "We want no more 'systems' or 'constitutions' – we shall have anarchy. Men will effect all by voluntary association, and abjure the foulness of the modern wage-slavery and city-mechanisms" (Fawcett 1893: 84). The trope of transformative, scientific destruction is repeated on an even larger scale in J.S. Fletcher's *The Three Days' Terror* (1901), in which science provides a revolutionary group known as 'The Dictators' with an unspecified technology that can destroy whole districts – they start with Charing Cross and then hold Britain to ransom.[29] The novel's detective recognizes the arrival of some new, destructive phenomenon: "This, sir, is not the work of Anarchists – at least, not of the old sort. This is the work of chemists of the first ability'" (Fletcher 1901: 72). The Prime Minister, Lord Granchester, echoes these sentiments in terms that anticipate *The Secret Agent*'s contrast of monitored and contained (and innocent) anarchist communities with a new, inexplicable phenomenon:

> "If this were an ordinary Anarchist outrage," replied Lord Granchester, "the police could do much. But its very character shows that it is not. Our secret police know the whereabouts of every suspicious character in London. It is my firm belief that if we arrest the whole body of suspected people, we shall arrest persons absolutely innocent of this crime. This is a new feature of the world's

[29] Fletcher's novel is evidently indebted to Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898), which also imagines whole districts of Britain being ravaged by technologically powerful adversary.

> history. I am sure of it. It is the beginning of a war of science against mere brute force." (Fletcher 1901: 117)

A later work that combines these dynamite-novel tropes with those of espionage fiction, John Buchan's *The Power-House* (1916, serialized 1913), also turns on the fear that technology has the power to transform anarchist intent into cataclysmic reality. The Power-House is a global, secret network of knowledge, comprising "nameless brains […] working silently in the background", which "now and then showed their power by some cataclysmic revelation", and thereby threatening the world with "super-anarchy" (Buchan 1916: 75).

Where these Promethean-technologists and the Professor diverge, however, is that the former are generally members or even leaders of the vast organizations that, as we have seen, is how the agents of terrorism were often represented in popular fiction. The Professor's lack of organizational affiliation is one of the things that distinguish him from the novel's propagandists who are members of the International Red Committee – a body the Professor rejects with scorn. The Professor is socially isolated, his lack of dependence on women offering another point of contrast with the other anarchists: "His single backroom, remarkable for having an extremely large cupboard, he rented furnished from two elderly spinsters, dress makers in a humble way with a clientele of servant girls mostly. He had a heavy padlock put on the cupboard, but otherwise he was a model lodger, giving no trouble, and requiring practically no attendance" (53). His isolation is a fundamental, not incidental feature of his character: he moves "unsuspected and deadly" among the crowds that he finds "odious", rejecting any social connection, "a force" rather than a person (231). In this, he might be considered a true anarchist, devoted to an idea – in his case, a utopian programme of "calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world" (231) – and not to

any organization.

Philosophical absolutism, and a morality at odds with social norms, is a third characteristic of Promethean-technologists. Conrad described the Professor to Cunninghame Graham as both "a fanatic" and "incorruptible" (*CL*3 491). The Professor's rejection of "social convention" (57) and dedication to the "disintegration" of "old morality" (60), his "absolute rule […] never to refuse anybody" (54) who requests explosives, irrespective of ideology or purpose, and the narrator's labelling of him as a "moral agent of destruction" (68), all suggest an extreme but sincere moral position.[30] This figure of the terrorist who is committed to destruction for its own sake probably originated with Zero in the Stevensons' satire *The Dynamiter* (1885), who, despite his technical incompetence, also maintains an absolute principle: "I shall remain devoted to the more emphatic, more striking, and (if you please) more popular method of the explosive bomb" (Stevenson and Stevenson 1984: 108). Similarly, Fawcett's Hartmann says he became an anarchist in order to "revenge myself on the race which produced and then wearied me" (Fawcett 1893: 83), while Max Pemberton's *Wheels of Anarchy* (1908) imagines the creation of an entirely new phenomenon of anarchism, nothing less than a "new race of assassins, ten times as powerful and twenty times as numerous as the followers of the Old Man of the Mountain": "These monsters kill and slay at their pleasure. Neither reason nor pity restrains them. They have no compassion for women, none for little children. The sanest among them does not know what he wants or how to get it" (Pemberton 1908: 78-79). All of these characters suggest an anxiety about the transformative effects of

[30] John Gray, however, sees the Professor's beliefs as "a ragbag of the pseudo-scientific superstitions of the time", and adds: "Like many progressive thinkers, the Professor affects a lucidity of thought that is devoid of sentimentality. In fact, his thinking is credulous and self-indulgent, shaped by a naïve positivist belief in science not much different from the faith in progress that animated the Victorian social order he despised" (Gray 2004: 103).

modern science, together with an inability to explain terrorist violence as a rational response to social and political realities. This is why both the anarchist-terrorists and Promethean technologists in these novels are fantastic to the point of marking these novels as belonging to the genre of science fiction. The Professor, whilst clearly derived from this type, lacks the fantastic attributes of other technologists: he is shabby, under-nourished, and physically unremarkable, and the only thing that his technology succeeds in destroying in the novel is Stevie. What distinguishes the Professor from his equivalents in 'dynamite novels' and the like is that he is a villain with an extreme ethical position: whereas other technologists (like Hume's Fernandez) make rhetorical claims to a principle of destruction, the Professor articulates the principle into a philosophy that regeneration can be brought about by destruction, a philosophy that he embodies, literally, with the apparatus of destruction (glass flask, indiarubber ball and tube) concealed inside his clothing.

Conclusion: "Subversive, Sanguinary Rot"

What this analysis of anarchists in 'An Informer', *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* has shown is that all three narratives are indebted to late-Victorian and Edwardian novels of terrorism and revolution, and that each negotiates the re-writing of anarchist or terrorist character types in a distinctive way and for different purposes. 'The Informer' examines the role-playing insincerity of the fashionable revolutionary to show politics as entertainment for the privileged; it uses its technique of unreliable narration and theme of role-playing to re-write *A Girl Among the Anarchists* into a modernist version of James's examination of class and politics, *The Princess Casamassima*, in which identity and reality remain shifting and uncertain. *The Secret Agent* examines anarchism and terrorism topically and ethically: it uses a satiric

method to ridicule both philosophical anarchism and the contemporary discourses that sought to present it as a threat to British liberty and security, and examines the ethics of terrorism by contrasting implicitly the violence resulting from Vladimir's political manipulation with the Professor's utopian doctrine of regeneration through destruction. Fiction about terrorism usually failed to imagine how and why terrorism might occur, and therefore retreated into science fiction;[31] *The Secret Agent* imagines a sincere, albeit unfulfilled, terrorist programme that rests on the idea of destruction as a regenerative force, rather than its fantastic realization in a 'future war' scenario. *Under Western Eyes* is, as we have already seen in the context of espionage fiction, less strongly influenced by populist genres, and, unlike *The Secret Agent*, it represents revolutionary philosophy, instead of simply ridiculing its practitioners, by dramatizing debates in Razumov's dialogues with Haldin and Sophia Antonovna particularly. This novel "concerned with nothing but ideas" (*CL*4 489) uses what I have analysed as three types of anarchist to interrogate anarchism philosophically and ethically. While the terrorists are mostly despicable morally, both Victor and Nathalie Haldin are idealists; the former's idealism, however, is shown to be a form of delusion, while the latter's idealism is, at least in the published novel, dissociated from revolutionary ideas, and Conrad's careful excision of anarchist sentiments from the novel's presentation of her suggests he could not bear to imagine a genuine, idealistic revolutionary.

All three narratives, then, examine the anarchists' words and deeds – the relationship between their rhetoric and their conduct – as a way of determining their sincerity. These narratives appear to suggest that insincere anarchism is ridiculous or

[31] A partial exception is Tom Greer's *A Modern Dædalus* (1885), which takes a sympathetic view of the motivations of rebellion in Ireland against what it sees as British colonialism. However, it too approaches science fiction, as well as invasion-scare fiction, by imagining a future war in which British forces are defeated by Irish aeronauts.

irresponsible, but unthreatening, while sincere anarchism is deluded or dangerous – suggesting a hostility towards anarchism however it is practised. A subtly different perspective, however, is provided by Conrad's first sustained examination of the theme, 'An Anarchist'. On the surface, it is as hostile towards anarchism as the three later narratives. Simon (known as 'Biscuit') and Mafile are both shams who use anarchism as a cover for robbery and exploitation. The "anarchist" of the title, identified by the narrator as "Paul the engineer", is a victim of Simon and Mafile, as Paul's story makes clear: "I remembered their lies, their promises, their menaces, and all my days of misery. Why could they not have left me alone after I came out of prison? I looked at them and thought that while they lived I could never be free" (*SS* 158). Paul claims to have been exploited and repeatedly fooled by the anarchists, who persuaded him to shout "*Vive l'anarchie!* Death to the capitalists!", to become their "*compagnon*", to participate in a bank robbery in which he carried a bomb "to wreck the place" (149), and finally to become a passive participant in the mutiny on the prison island where all three have become incarcerated. However, the narrator, who meets Paul on the Marañon Estate where he is working following his escape from the prison island, suspects that Paul is not the reluctant anarchist he appears to believe himself to be. Indeed, the narrator speculates that Paul's emotional sensitivity makes him a particularly sincere kind of anarchist:

> On the whole, my idea is that he was much more of an anarchist than he confessed to me or to himself; and that, the special features of his case apart, he was very much like many other anarchists. Warm heart and weak head – that is the word of the riddle; and it is a fact that the bitterest contradictions and the deadliest conflicts of the world are carried on in every individual breast capable of feeling and passion. (160-61)

The narrator's redefinition of anarchism as sympathetic (albeit simple-minded) humanitarianism invites us to consider it as morally (albeit irrationally) positive, in contrast to the exploitative and self-serving practices of Simon and Mafile. Furthermore, the story forces us to question our assumptions about the ethics of anarchism by focusing attention on the ethics of its adversary, consumer capitalism. The narrator's description of Paul in the last sentence of the story as "the anarchist slave of the Marañon estate" brings us back to the condemnation of capitalist business practices – the rapaciousness of the B.O.S. Co., Ltd which charges "two dollars per diem" for its "hospitality" and refuses to pay a wage to Paul – with which the story begins (138). The estate's manager, Harry Gee, justifies this exploitation of the workforce to the narrator with emotional contempt for "the cowardly bomb-throwing brutes" (142) and their ideology that he assumes Paul espouses:

> But that subversive sanguinary rot of doing away with all law and order in the world makes my blood boil. It's simply cutting the ground from under the feet of every decent, respectable, hard-working person. I tell you that the consciences of people who have them, like you or I, must be protected in some way; or else the first low scoundrel that came along would in every respect be just as good as myself. Wouldn't he now? And that's absurd! (144)

Clearly Gee, the agent of exploitation, considers himself to be the "decent, respectable, hard-working person" who would be at risk from an anarchist revolution. The sceptical narrator, however, sees through this justification, as his ironic commentary on Gee's practice of withholding wages from Paul confirms: "I admitted that, for a company spending fifty thousand pounds every year on advertising, the strictest economy was obviously necessary" (144). Furthermore, Gee labels him an anarchist to "hold him by that name better than if I had him chained up by the leg"; Gee does not mention

'slavery', but that is clearly what he is practising, a point acknowledged by the narrator's reference to Paul as "the anarchist slave of the Marañon estate" (161). Gee's treatment of Paul is not for personal gain but "out of a sense of duty to the company" (143). This, together with the narrator's disgust at the company's practices and products – he speculates that the fresh meat produced on the estate has made Paul ill (161) – and his generalizing of its strategy of marketing its products to the gullible as "the modern system of advertising" (136), shows that the ironic protest in this fable of exploitation is directed at modern capitalism.[32] The story's exploration of the ethics of both anarchism and capitalism serves a social and economic criticism in which the man labelled "anarchist" is the moral positive in contrast with the criminals and capitalists who exploit him.

The narrator's sentiments resemble those Conrad expressed to Cunninghame Graham after the publication of *The Secret Agent*. Having denied that he has "been satirizing the revolutionary world" in the novel, Conrad exclaimed, "By Jove! If I had the necessary talent I would like to go for the true anarchist – which is the millionaire. Then you would see the venom flow. But it's too big a job" (*CL*3 491). Despite this self-effacing disclaimer, Conrad had two years before resumed work on a story, *Chance*, that would take a further seven years to complete and includes a portrait of "the true anarchist" in the person of "the great de Barral". Anarchism was, therefore connected morally in Conrad's mind with its political obverse, consumer capitalism. In the next chapter, I shall explore how the character type of the swindler in *Chance* and 'The Partner' (1912) enabled Conrad to take further the social and economic criticism that he had begun in 'An Anarchist'.

[32] For an original and perceptive analysis of the story's critique of modern capitalism, and advertising in particular, see Donovan (2005: 128-43).

Chapter 5

"The Perpetrator of the Most Heartless Frauds":

Swindlers

Introduction

Financial crime, like detection and anarchism, was of great interest and concern to the British reading public in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflecting dramatic economic and social changes resulting from a financial revolution that brought into being what was, in effect, a new economy. At the heart of what was new was exponential growth in economic participation as a result of huge increases in joint-stock companies – which raise capital through the sale of shares to the public – so that by the end of the century more than a million Britons had become shareholders. This meant not only that there was more credit available, but also that Britain become more dependent upon an increasingly complex financial system, creating cultural anxiety as well as economic growth. As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, it is this phenomenon that fuelled the growing interest in financial crime – specifically the figure of the swindler – in narratives including Conrad's short story 'The Partner' (1911), which features an insurance swindle, as well as the novel *Chance* in which Marlow observes the individual and social effects of the collapse of de Barral's fraudulent banking and investment empire. Although Conrad is writing in a distinctive social-critical literary tradition that includes such notable examples as Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) and Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875), I shall show that swindlers and financial crime more generally had, by the end of the nineteenth century,

become a favourite topic for popular authors, some of whom wrote in genres such as science-fiction or detective fiction.

Indeed, detective fiction – a reliable yardstick of the enthusiasms and anxieties of the age – provides particularly good evidence for the popular appeal of narratives about swindlers. During the genre's so-called "golden age" of the 1920s and 1930s, murder became the defining crime of the English detective story, so much so that, in a famous essay, W.H. Auden described the genre's "basic formula" as follows: "a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies" (Symons 1974: 8). Early detective fiction, however, is both less formulaic and more closely concerned with various kinds of deception, often for financial gain: it is fraud as much as murder that the Victorian and Edwardian detective is usually to be found investigating. There are notable examples from Conan Doyle's first collection of Holmes short stories, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892), such as 'A Case of Identity', 'The Red-Headed League', 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' and 'The Engineer's Thumb', in all of which Holmes penetrates a mystery that is centred on various kinds of elaborate deception. The *Strand*'s Holmes surrogate, Martin Hewitt, has an even closer link to the domain of finance:

> There were several of the larger London banks and insurance offices from which Hewitt held a sort of general retainer as detective adviser, in fulfilment of which he was regularly consulted as to the measures to be taken in different cases of fraud, forgery, theft, and so forth, which it might be the misfortune of the particular firms to encounter. (Morrison 1895: 187)

Even more pertinent is that sub-category of crime fiction whose anti-heroes are rogue detectives or criminals. As well as the Raffles saga by Conan Doyle's brother-in-law

E.W. Hornung, concerning a gentleman-thief who pits his wits against the police and other, rival criminals, this sub-genre included Morrison's series *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897), in which the swindler Horace Dorrington manages a firm of "private enquiry agents" (Morrison 1897: 19) in order to swindle his clients or the criminals he is employed to investigate; the financial theme of several of Dorrington's cases, such as 'The Affair of the "Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Co., Limited"', brings the tropes and techniques of detective fiction into the commercial and financial world of patents, company promotion, and speculation. Guy Boothby's crooked Simon Carne fraudulently adopts the disguise of the detective 'Klimo' in *A Prince of Swindlers* (1900), while Clifford Ashdown's criminal-detective Romney Pringle uses a literary agency as his base of operations for various cunning frauds – a sardonic nod to this new profession that was part of the period's revolution in how fiction was written and published.[1] Even in detective stories that do feature a corpse, the murder is often accompanied by some elaborate imposture or deception. G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown story, 'The Eye of Apollo' (1911), for example, has an American swindler posing as Kalon, the "New Priest of Apollo" (Chesterton 1950: 194). His assumed identity, and his creation of a sun-worshipping religion in London's Victoria Street, are ruses designed merely to aggravate the blindness of one of Kalon's disciples, an heiress, so that he can trick her to both favour him in her will and then fall to her death. Kalon exemplifies the tendency of fictional criminals in the period to go to the most extreme lengths of complexity and ambition to obtain their pecuniary advantages, and part of the pleasure of reading these stories is following the detective's deconstruction of a bizarre sequence of events into its fundamental elements of greed and desire for power.

[1] For the effect of the literary agent on British fiction in the period, see Hepburn (1968) and Gillies (2007).

A fascination with financial deception is also evident in science fiction and 'future war' or 'invasion scare' fiction. One now very obscure example that straddles these genres is *A Fortune from the Sky* (1903) by 'Skelton Kuppord' (the Scottish academic Sir John Adams), in which the hero's adventures with a scientist who has perfected a device that destroys all life along entire lines of longitude are initiated by his being beggared by a company promoter, Mr Wallaby-Jones, who absconds with the proceeds of "all manner of bogus companies" he has created (Kuppord 1903: 20). The science fiction writer Robert Cromie similarly offered a mixture of the fantastic and the financial in his *A New Messiah* (1902), while Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) imagines a future Britain riven by a social chasm between capitalists and the proletariat, into which the 'sleeper', Graham, wakes to find that his investment in road-surfacing technology has matured to make him the richest man in the world.

"The absurd infatuations of the investing public"

Why were writers and, we can infer, readers so interested in financial crime and deception in the period? For a start, occasional scandals ensured that the swindler remained topical, as he had been from at least the 1850s. The famous financier who, having seduced a credulous public, takes his own life when faced with his impending downfall, became a recurring figure in nineteenth-century fiction, usually inspired by notorious cases of large-scale fraud involving bankers and company promoters. The banker John Sadleir, who embezzled £200,000 from his Tipperary Joint-Stock Bank and issued fictitious Swedish railway shares to the value of £150,000, committed suicide in 1856 after the crash of his bank (Robb 1992: 61); Charles Dickens lost no

time in incorporating Sadleir's fictional analogue, Merdle, into *Little Dorrit* (1857).[2] Albert Grant specialized in fraudulent promotions and stock exchange flotations of companies he promoted or created, often to work railways, mines, and utilities overseas, in a career of swindling that lasted from 1863 to his bankruptcy in 1877; Grant was still active when Trollope drew on his example to satirize the Victorian way of commerce in *The Way We Live Now* (1875). In the figure of Augustus Melmotte, Trollope's novel elides political influence and financial corruption: Melmotte swindles the public with an American railway flotation, while, like Grant, becoming a Member of Parliament (Robb 1992: 102). As the novel's title suggests, Melmotte is part of a satire on innovation and the debasement of traditional values: "Melmotte represents counterfeit forms of wealth – above all, stock market speculation – not tied to land or to Britain's aristocratic traditions" (Brantlinger 1996: 171).

The 1890s saw a boom in both company promotion and in associated fraud, which, amongst other cultural effects, found musical expression in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Utopia, Limited* (1893), in which the King of Utopia avoids assassination by becoming, like King Leopold of Belgium, a limited company (Robb 1992: 103-04). George Gissing's *The Whirlpool* (1897) has a company promoter and banker, Bennet Frothingham, whom Gissing based on a particularly notorious case from the decade – the exposure and escape to Argentina in 1892 of Jabez Balfour, Member of Parliament and founder of the supposedly philanthropic Liberator Building Society, which had by 1879 become Britain's biggest building society (McKie 2005: 17). For the Liberator and the other companies in his network, Balfour operated false accounts on a grand

[2] While, as Patrick Brantlinger notes, Dickens's focus was on the private effects of financial corruption and he largely exonerated financial institutions in his fiction, his magazine *All the Year Round* carried several articles in 1864-5 by Malcolm Laing Meason, criticizing developments such as permitting limited liability for banks; Meason's wrote two books on financial bubbles and panics in 1865 and 1866 (Brantlinger 1996: 161).

scale, concealing massive debts as handsome profits, and deceiving so many investors that when he eventually came to trial in 1895, "the court had trouble recruiting a jury" of men untouched by Balfour's frauds (McKie 2005: 213). Balfour lived until 1916, but Gissing's Frothingham follows nineteenth-century literary tradition by committing suicide and triggering the ruin of his many investors. His Britannia Loan, Assurance, Investment, and Banking Company, Limited has implicated investors at every level of society, but Gissing explores the widespread corruption of a materialist society through the fortunes (literally and metaphorically) of Frothingham's beautiful, accomplished daughter Alma. After her father's death, she receives proposals from three suitors looking for unconventional relationships; the first is for a marriage in name only, the second for a sexual liaison, and the third proposal, from the hero Harvey Rolfe, for a liberated marriage in which Alma can pursue her intellectual and musical interests. While the third proposal shows Rolfe's sincerity and morality, the first two demonstrate that Bennet Frothingham's fall has triggered a collapse in Alma's value on the marriage market.[3] Alma then becomes implicated, as perpetrator and victim, in a vicious, pervasive culture of gossip in London's society – one of several referents of Gissing's "whirlpool" – that mirrors the economic and financial reality of stocks and shares in which value is determined by information of variable reliability. Alma's husband Harvey Rolfe – a typical Gissing hero, modest and enthused by Classical antiquity and Mediterranean travel – is an emblem of integrity in his social relations (he avoids society) and business and financial ethics. The only business in which he involves himself is becoming a partner with the feckless Cecil Morphew in a photography shop in London; as his finances deteriorate, he sells some debentures but

[3] See S.J. James (2003: 133): "Once the price of Alma decreases, she is left vulnerable to a commercial transaction (hostile takeover? speculative deposit?) from the characters closest to the workings of the economy".

his natural caution causes him to avoid "the risks of speculation" (Gissing 1984: 216). He studies the money-market but "the mere thought of a great reduction of income made him tremble and perspire" so he takes a banker's advice and invests in "a sound security, but less productive than that he had previously held" (Gissing 1984: 249). Gissing's novel shows an awareness of the economic centrality of share ownership among the middle and upper classes – Morphew's business fails, while a bicycle factory in Coventry run by Rolfe's friend Hugh Carnaby thrives on the capital derived from a flotation – while continuing and extending the nineteenth-century novel's tradition of social criticism in its treatment of finance: alongside Harold Frederic and H.G. Wells, Gissing added a naturalistic dimension to the criticism by showing the sexual and biological determinants and effects of financial activity (S. J. James 2003: 129-38). Wells, sharing his friend Gissing's distaste for speculation, discovered particularly resonant source material in the case of James Whitaker Wright, whose bond scheme to fund the Baker Street and Waterloo Railway collapsed in 1900 revealing Wright's fraudulent accounting practices, and who sensationally committed suicide with cyanide at the end of his trial in the Royal Courts of Justice in 1904. Wells's Edward Ponderevo (Teddy) in *Tono-Bungay* is modelled on Wright, down to Teddy's billiard room being situated, like Wright's ballroom at his Surrey mansion, beneath a lake.

Such scandals were only the most prominent cases: swindling was endemic in the Victorian period, with one estimate being that one in six Victorian company promotions was fraudulent (Robb 1992: 96). But the scandals were merely the eye-catching symptoms of a more profound development – the transformation of the British economy during the Victorian period. Financial and commercial deception was the unforeseen criminal consequence of the unprecedented increase in capacity of the

British economy that followed the Industrial Revolution. As George Robb (1992: 1-2) has pointed out, this was nothing less than the creation of a new economy "characterized by a vast banking network, a burgeoning commercial nexus of insurance, stocks and credit, and an increasingly complicated legal system". Permissive legislation, lack of regulation, and an inability by the state to keep pace with and control the new financial forces unleashed by industrialization meant that financial crime on a massive scale was inevitable.

The joint-stock company – the main instrument of economic growth – was called into being by booms such as the "railway mania" of 1845 and enabled by legislation such as the Banking and Company Acts of 1844 (which led to a doubling of joint-stock companies within ten years). These Acts were nonetheless relatively strict; more permissive legislation followed in the 1850s and 1860s, extending the principle of limited liability for investors, which caused the increase in number of joint-stock companies to become exponential. Approximately 900 such companies existed before the railway boom, but there were 5,000 new companies per year by the century's end, so that approximately 2.3 billion pounds – around 40% of the nation's wealth – was invested in shares, "more than twice the sum of French and German company investment combined" (Robb 1992: 26, 28, 181). This meant a massive increase in the number of shareholders: in the 1830s, the London Stock Exchange dealt almost exclusively with government stock, so even in the financial sector there was very little ownership of or dealing in company shares (Kynaston 2011: 47), but by the end of the nineteenth century approximately one million Britons owned shares in a joint-stock company. As the pioneering economist J.A. Hobson noted in his *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism* (1894):

> Thus it has come to pass that in every field of capitalist industry joint-stock enterprise has been rapidly displacing privately-owned businesses. […] But after "limited liability" was set on a solid legal footing the movement became very rapid and widespread. The application of this new capitalist structure, first to public loans, then to railroad, shipping, mining, and banking enterprises, the enormous expansion of public or "company" development in the supply of municipal services, and finally the extension to industrial companies of every sort and size, have revolutionised the character of modern economics and politics. Countless thousands of citizens in America or Great Britain are part-owners of lands, railroads, minerals, factories, municipal plants, and public revenues in all parts of the civilised or semi-civilised world. (Hobson 1906: 237)

Those participating in the new world of national and international investment included Conrad himself, who invested in the gold-mining boom of the 1890s by purchasing shares in Rorke's Roodeport, Ltd., in 1895, the collapse of which prompted one of Conrad's many financial crises (Stape 2007: 95).

There were other associated changes. The new economy brought about a host of financial innovations, such as share-dealing, and the increased complexity of business ownership and activity, combined with the increased distance between ownership (by shareholders) and management (by directors and company employees), led to increasing specialization; while this ultimately brought about the emergence of finance professionals, such as accountants, auditors, and company law specialists, it also meant that most investors remained largely ignorant of what was actually being done with their money. Again, Hobson anxiously noted the implications. He saw directorships as "oligarchies", wielding "despotic power" over "a great capitalist proletariat" who invested money but had little or no knowledge, control or influence with respect to the company's operations: "this expediency of concentrated control forms the rational basis of a financial power which, as we shall see, is liable to great

and dangerous abuses" (Hobson 1906: 241-42). At the same time, the collapse in land values in the 1880s – reflected explicitly in works such as *Tono-Bungay,* Frederic's *The Market-Place* (1899), and Hilaire Belloc's *Emmanuel Burden* (1904) – saw a fundamental shift in wealth from the country to the City. As one young aristocrat, Miss Plowden, complains in *The Market-Place*: "the good families have so little money, and all the fortunes are in the hands of the stock-jobbing people – and so on" (Frederic 1899: 91).

Miss Plowden's disdain for financial entrepreneurs is matched by the reactions to these developments from members of the cultural aristocracy. Dickens, Trollope, Gissing, and Wells all portrayed the financial world as exploitative and threatening; the financial entrepreneurs of their novels – speculative bankers and company promoters – are criminals. Disdain for speculators was not, of course, new in British culture – Samuel Johnson had after all defined "stock jobber" in his *Dictionary* as "a low wretch who gets money by buying and selling shares in the funds [i.e. government stock]" (Kynaston 2011: 17). What was new in the mid-nineteenth century was a financial system that was becoming highly innovative (and therefore raising the spectre of unforeseen catastrophe), unstable (as evidenced by the number of financial scandals throughout the Victorian and Edwardian periods), and implicated a growing proportion of the British public. The distaste and unease already apparent in *Little Dorrit* therefore increased and intensified in direct proportion to the growth of the new economy in the subsequent five decades. Commentators and authors reinforced each others' concerns in the process, as in this passage about company promoters from the *National Review* in 1898:

> In the domain of finance – which, whether local or cosmopolitan, is fast becoming the world's tyrant – the primeval "forest-burn rapacity" of the

> human species may be seen in full and almost unfettered operation […] At any rate, as regards the fraternity of promoters, both individuals and corporate, their morals may be best described in the words of Gabriel Borkman, the financier in Ibsen's latest drama, as "the morals of the higher rascality" […] There is something disagreeably un-English about the new financial methods and the vulgar trickery and chicane which characterize them; […] the beginnings of pecuniary corruption may also, whatever our new Machiavellians may say, be the seeds of a nation's decadence.[4]

As this passage shows, anxiety about financial innovation and business ethics was situated within the wider narrative of concern over decadent morality, biological atavism, and national decline that became particularly acute at the end of the nineteenth century. The imprint of this anxiety is visible in both literary fiction (Gissing, Wells et al.), populist and genre fiction (Conan Doyle, Cromie, Clifford Ashdown et al.), and on the stage. Harley Granville-Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905) follows Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) in examining society through a narrative about embezzlement. At the play's beginning, Granville-Barker positions the narrative in the new economy, with its opening lines about the falling price of "Alguazils Preferred" (Granville-Barker 1967: 1). Mr Voysey's thirty-year career of speculating with the capital deposited with his firm by clients attracted by his "reputation for wealth" (39) is itself an inheritance from his father, who had "a perfect mania for petty speculation" (9-10). This legacy of fraud, inherited by Edward Voysey, is almost inescapable, and the play goes to considerable lengths to show cupidity operating throughout society, with Peacey, the firm's clerk, as well as the upper-middle-class Voyseys, benefiting from the frauds. That we are meant to see speculative capitalism as the new basis for wealth in British society is confirmed by Mr Voysey's

[4] Hugh Stutfield, 'The Higher Rascality', *National Review*, 31 March 1898, pp. 75, 84-85 (qtd. in Robb 1992: 3, 186).

comment that business "now-a-days is run on the lines of the confidence trick" (39), Alice Maitland's view that "most money is obtained" by similar methods (63), and Peacey's retort to Edward's accusation that he is content for others to steal on his behalf: "And who isn't?" (71).

The Voysey Inheritance is an example of a tradition of economic and social criticism that developed from the nineteenth-century cultural distaste for the new economy – and ultimately, perhaps, from an older English cultural tradition, what Cedric Watts calls the "mystification" of money and "demonization of usury" (Watts 1990: 3).[5] Some (but by no means all) examples of what David Trotter has identified as "the Edwardian novel of finance" (Trotter 1993: 52) exhibit the disillusioned, social-critical approach of Granville-Barker's play, and broadly position themselves as literary rather than genre fiction.[6] Trotter's list also includes examples from a competing tradition, in which money and the financial world were the objects of sympathetic or amused scrutiny, or were associated with glamour and power, such as Morley Roberts's *The Colossus* and Oppenheim's *A Millionaire of Yesterday*. The differences between these two traditions are evident in how they handle the fundamental issues of interest and concern raised by the new economy: trust, competition, and the social significance of financial crime.

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[5] Watts (1990: 4), presumably following Marx, identifies three forms of "mystification" about money in culture: "negative mystification" where "money is denounced as a general corrupter and disrupter, and the writer may postulate a prior or subsequent 'Golden Age' which is envisaged as moneyless", "positive mystification" where "money is either lauded for its magical potency or is associated with a benign providence", and "covert mystification" whose "various forms include the obscuring of socially low people so as to ratify the enjoyment of wealth by the socially high." A "localised" version of this is the depiction of the Jew as "demonically avaricious".

[6] Trotter's list of Edwardian novels of finance includes both populist and literary novels: Morley Roberts, *The Colossus* (1899), Harold Frederic, *The Market-Place* (1899), E. Phillips Oppenheim, *A Millionaire of Yesterday* (1900), Joseph Conrad and F.M. Hueffer, *The Inheritors* (1901), Arnold Bennett, *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902), Barry Pain, *Deals* (1904), Hilaire Belloc, *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), H.G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1908), Joseph Conrad, *Chance* (1913), Oliver Onions, *The Debit Account* (1914).

Pain's witty stories, first published as *City Chronicles* (December 1900-November 1901) in the mass-circulation *Windsor Magazine*[7] inhabit a world of banks, share prices, and commodity markets, with plots ranging from entirely legitimate speculative one-upmanship ('A Modern Sibyl') to a reworking of 'The Pardoner's Tale' in which a businessman murders his partner for gain but accidentally kills himself in the process ('An Exploration Enterprise'). On one level these are stories about basic human needs and weaknesses – greed, trust, security – but on another they deal with the very particular risks and ethical choices required by the early twentieth-century British economy, entertaining the readers of *Windsor Magazine* with the practices and operations of modern finance incorporated into narratives of rivalry, deceit, and cunning. What is striking about *Deals* is the absence of criticism of the new economy. The stories explore and dramatize the tensions between traditional moral values and new business practices, but do so without satirical distance and with an amused and morally neutral tone. This is apparent in how Pain explores the theme of trust, that fundamental value in business transactions. In 'Greasewell's House Paints', for example, Alfred Peach is a millionaire company promoter; unlike many others of his ilk in the period's fiction, he is not a swindler, although his motives for honesty are self-interested:

> He was spoken of with respect. His companies were all of them flourishing; they were all dividend-payers, and some of them paid a very fair dividend indeed. […] As a matter of fact, his system had always been to give the public as much as he thought good for them, and scoop the rest. Some people diddle

[7] Another example of a 'City of London entertainment' from the same magazine is Richard Marsh's 'La Haute Finance: A Tale of the Biggest Coup on Record' (February 1902), in which a stock-jobber and his American partner bring about war between France and Germany to create, to their advantage, a bear market on the London Stock Exchange.

> the public; Mr Peach thought this a mistake, except within reasonable limits – you may want them again. (Pain 1904: 28-29)

It is Peach who is himself deceived and then kidnapped by a confidence trickster posing as Bulstrode, an inventor: the latter's criminal exploitation of trust contrasts with Peach's wily yet relatively ethical attitude to the investing public. Peach's disappearance causes the share price of his company, Greasewell's House Paints, Limited, to plummet, as investors suppose that he has, like other swindlers of the period, absconded – showing that the sensitivity of markets to rumour makes them susceptible to exploitation. However, while Pain's stories offer a sophisticated exploration of financial and commercial behaviour and ethics and their social consequences, highlighting the complexity and uncertainty that financial and economic change has created, they are far from being a condemnation of the economic system. Peach plays the system but does so within ethical limits that are both self-imposed and self-interested, having built a reputation for fair-dealing which is the asset he trades upon in the market: "A very nervous condition characterized the speculative and investing public at the moment. […] In spite of the nervous tension, Mr Peach had no doubt that the public would come into his "Greasewell's House Paints, Limited," as soon as it had a chance, seeing that Mr Peach was the chairman, and remembering that Mr Peach had done them good aforetime" (Pain 1904: 29).

Similarly, Pain's story 'Unlikelies' concerns speculation on shares in a New Zealand gold mine in which a bluestocking actuary and a company solicitor – themselves examples of workers in the new economy – create a bear market in the mine's shares by paying for booming notices to appear in the financial press, knowing that their effect will be the opposite to their apparent intention: "Now, it is wrong to think that favourable notices in papers of this class have no effect on dealers,

supposing that the dealers happen to see the notices. They incline the man who knows to a very pessimistic view of the company that requires such rotten support" (Pain 1904: 181). The new economy is so complex and sensitive that bluffs have been superseded by double-bluffs, and distrust as much as trust can be anticipated for financial advantage. However, Pain's stories accept this exploitation of trust (and distrust) as a feature of modern business without diagnosing it as a symptom of social corruption.

That universalizing approach is taken by Hilaire Belloc in his social satires *Emmanuel Burden* (1904) and *Mr Clutterbuck's Election* (1908), both of which are characterized by a heavily ironic tone that serves a strong moral and social criticism of the new economy. Burden is an ironmongery merchant who is deceived into investing in the M'Korio Delta Syndicate, a project to turn a West African river and lagoon into a gold mine, by a group of speculators led by Barnett. Barnett, who reappears in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election*, is Belloc's portrait of the dark side of the new economy, his fraudulent speculations battening on a gullible public, whose Jewishness is a stereotyping suggestive of Watts's account of the "demonization of usury" (Watts 1990: 3). Barnett is emblematic of a new, and successful, world of business – unlike the swindlers of the nineteenth-century three-deckers, he goes on to enjoy financial success, a peerage, and extensive political influence. For Belloc, one of the evils of the speculative economy is its function as enabler of colonialism: "applied finance […] is but another word for Imperial endeavour" (Belloc 1904: 72). This is partly a reflection of reality – the spectacular growth of the London money markets towards the end of the nineteenth century occurred largely to service overseas investments and imperial expansion – and partly an expression of the anti-imperialist ideology that Belloc shared with J.A. Hobson, who similarly characterized imperialism as motivated by "the

pressure of capitalist industries for markets, primarily markets for investment, secondarily markets for surplus products of home industry" (Hobson 1906: 262), a position he set out at length in his influential *Imperialism: A Study* (1902).

Emmanuel Burden is not hostile to businesses run on traditional lines: Burden is a successful merchant whose personal wealth derives from commerce in material goods. Its message is that a corrupting, globalized ethic of speculation is displacing honest and hard-working businessmen like Burden and his friend Abbott, a pugnacious ship-owner.[8] As in Barry Pain's stories, a speculative economy can be manipulated and exploited; where Belloc differs from Pain is in showing this to be symptomatic of social corruption, as the exploitation of credit – in all senses of the word – is a moral abuse rather than merely financial activity. Thus, Burden stands for traditional values, with tradition and integrity being indivisible:

> He had perhaps never in his life deceived a human being. His business, founded upon ample capital, demanding no credit, existing as a wholesale resource for the trade and independent of advertisement, never required it of him to lie, to cheat, to gamble, or to destroy another's wealth. Its expansion had been automatic; if his success had raised in him any evil, it was certainly nothing worse than a slight tincture of pride. (Belloc 1904: 80)

By contrast, the critics of speculators like Barnett "are haunted by a nightmare of Cosmopolitan Finance – pitiless, destructive of all national ideals, obscene, and eating out the heart of our European tradition" (Belloc 1904: 89), the coded term "Cosmopolitan" suggesting that Barnett's Jewishness is dangerous and alien. Barnett's businesses are innovative, speculative, and manipulate the investing public. His first

[8] Michie (2009: 131-90) provides a comprehensive survey of financial-themed fiction in the period, charting its increasing anxiety over the British economy's increasing dependence on speculation over commerce.

venture is the Haymarket Bank, which "depended upon a principle which, had it but proved successful, would have revolutionized the financial world" (Belloc 1904: 70). The Bank paid a rate of interest fixed at eight per cent.[9] "At first it was difficult to persuade a public wedded, wherever money was concerned, to formal routine; but when, at the end of the first year, the eight per cent. was duly paid […] timidity gave place to enthusiasm, [and] for eighteen months the institution increased as though by magic" (Belloc 1904: 70). The implication here is that such high-yield investments are the result of either sorcery or stage-deception – a simile that also appears in *Chance* (see p. 286 below). The public's trust having been secured, the Haymarket uses it to attract a flow of new investors whose deposits are, in reality, the source of the interest paid out: "No limit threatened the expansion of the business, till a venomous article […] suggested that the interest paid could only come out of the new capital daily furnished to the concern. A panic followed this abominable insinuation […] and within twenty-four hours, the Haymarket Bank was ruined" (Belloc 1904: 71).

Barnett's M'Korio Delta Syndicate is funded, like most major speculations, by a stock exchange flotation, and Belloc's narrator describes the share-dealing that results as doing "business with the future" (Belloc 1904: 86). Burden is amazed by the effects of the flotation of the Syndicate in which he has a quarter share: "He was astounded at these fluctuations, but more astounded at the permanently high level which M.D.D.'s [M'Korio Delta Dividends] maintained, in spite of the rough sea upon which they were tossed. Sudden fortunes sprang around him, sudden reputations startled and but half convinced his sober mind" (Belloc 1904: 240). Everything associated with the Syndicate is fraudulent, including its apparently traditional and

[9] Compare the "three per cent Consols" – 'consolidated annuities' or British government unredeemable bonds – in which the cautious Timothy Forsyte invests his windfall in *The Man of Property* (1906), prompting the narrator to comment: "By this act he had at once assumed an isolated position, no other Forsyte being content with less than four per cent for his money" (Galsworthy 1951: 18-19).

European furniture: an office chair is "of the kind known in the trade as 'Dutch Medieval Easy'; fashioned of American hickory so treated as to resemble old English oak, and handsomely upholstered in a green imitation of Spanish leather" (Belloc 1904: 224). Having been taken in by Barnett's blandishments, Burden begins to doubt the substance of the enterprise in which he has invested, and his doubts are a reflection of the uncertainty and unease brought about by the new economy:

> Eddies of uncertainty swirled in his mind. The Bankers were as firm as the Bank of England, the Brokers were of immense respectability, the very name of the Solicitors seemed like a part of the Constitution; but all these things did but increase his disease – they seemed to him to be at the same time England, and not England. It was as though a man should be given a picture framed in a solid familiar frame – a frame suited to hold the portrait of his father – and hung before his table; and as though, in such a setting, the picture within constantly shifted and changed, now terrifying, now evil, now grotesque, now merely irritant, but always a night-mare of discord. (Belloc 1904: 218-19)

Here, the corrosive effects of the manipulation of perception that, in Belloc's view, are fundamental to company promotion, flotation, and speculation, are spelt out as not simply an erosion of the value of trust, but more fundamentally as a chaotic denaturing of national identity. Its effects on the individual are nightmarishly disorienting, and on a national scale are potentially disastrous.

Belloc's social criticism echoes not only Hobson's economic and moral case against imperialism but also that made in *The Inheritors*, which combines the role of financier and empire builder in the Duc de Mersch, whose plan to found a model state in Greenland requires funding from a range of financial vehicles in London. "The Duc de Mersch wanted money, and he wanted to run a railway across Greenland. His idea was that the British public should supply the money and the British Government back

the railway…" (*I* 25). The Duc is also a company-promoter: he has been moving "somewhere at the bottom of these seemingly bottomless concerns" – the "All Round the World Cable Company", the "Pan-European Railway, Exploration, and Civilization Company", and the "International Housing of the Poor Company" (*I* 58). *The Inheritors* uses the Duc de Mersch to satirize international philanthropy (several critics have observed that the Duc is based in part on Leopold II of Belgium, and that Greenland therefore stands in for the Congo Free State), as well as the expansionist policies of the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain (Hampson 2012a: 68). It shares with Belloc's works, then, a dissatisfaction with the political and economic status quo. It does not, however, attempt a sustained critique of the new economy: its generic instability and diversity of satirical targets crowd in on the novel, reducing the Duc de Mersch's financial operations to one narrative concern among many. Moreover, unlike the fictional swindlers whom he resembles, the Duc de Mersch has not succeeded in persuading the investing public: "British investors wouldn't trust the Duc without some sort of guarantee from the British Government, and no other investor would trust him on any terms" (*I* 58). Trust, the value that has been corroded beyond recovery in Belloc's narratives, remains dependable in the British political economy, despite the presence in Kent and London of invaders from the Fourth Dimension.

For one of the most popular writers of the period, the new economy was a source of fascination and glamour rather than threat. E. Phillips Oppenheim's *A Millionaire of Yesterday* (1900) treats financial competition in what is otherwise an adventure novel; trust is a theme, and while (as in *Deals*) it is shown to be vulnerable to manipulation, it is nonetheless an abiding code of business. Codes of business, and their place in the harsh, competitive environments of London's financial centre and the goldmines of West Africa, are what the novel's speculator-hero, Scarlett Trent, is

tested against. Like Belloc's Barnett, Trent creates a joint-stock company (the Bekwando Syndicate) to fund gold prospecting and mining. The novel examines Trent's conduct in the West African jungle of Bekwando, with its warlike natives, harsh terrain, and buried treasure, juxtaposed against the metaphorical jungle of a City of London characterized by "roar and clamour, the strife of tongues and the measuring of wits" (Oppenheim n.d.: 55). The West African jungle even has its own swindler, in the shape of a witch-doctor whose tyranny over his people is broken when Trent defeats him in battle and destroys his fetishes. The novel thus employs the genre of adventure fiction to depict a 'primitive' and a 'sophisticated' urban and western version of masculine endeavour: the virtues of the adventure hero – physical and mental courage, endurance, resilience, integrity, the subordination of personal desires to a higher objective – are required to succeed in the jungle and the City. Trent's success "had not been the victory of honied falsehoods, of suave deceit, of gentle but legalised robbery. He had been a hard worker, a daring speculator with nerves of iron, and courage which would have glorified a nobler cause" (Oppenheim n.d.: 56). The correspondences between jungle and City also include the witch-doctor's fetishes and the Bekwando Syndicate's stock: both are equally reliant on 'credit' to remain effective.[10] However, in this novel there is no social criticism by suggesting a 'primitive' dimension to modern capitalism: Trent's jungle adventures legitimize his City activity, showing both to be courageous. Furthermore, by destroying credit in the fetish, and building his career on the Syndicate's stock, Trent enacts a colonial project, replacing an indigenous economy with an imperialist one. In sharp contrast with Belloc's anti-imperialism, in Oppenheim's novel this is clearly presented as progress.

[10] For the dependence of capitalist economies on what Marx called "commodity fetishism", see Brantlinger (1996: 148): "The 'fetishisms' of money and capital as dominant, universalizing commodity forms are especially "mysterious" […] arising as they do from the already highly abstract, quasi-religious mechanisms of banking, stock-market speculation, and the national debt".

Trent, in fact, is one of a number of financial titans in the period's popular fiction, who push the boundaries of business ethics but remain moral, glamorous, and heroic. Arnold Bennett's popular serial, *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, for example, has as its hero an heroic American plutocrat, Theodore Racksole, whose positive presentation contrasts with the suspicious treatments of American finance in works such as *The Way We Live Now*, Marsh's 'La Haute Finance', and *Nostromo*. (In this serial Bennett also offers a sympathetic treatment (against the grain in the period) of a Jewish banker, Sampson Levi.) Other examples include Max Pemberton's Jehan Cavanagh in *Wheels of Anarchy* (1908), who possesses "a mastery of the intricacies of finance and of the financial diplomacy of nations which has never been surpassed" and a "wonderful magnetism of his presence" (Pemberton 1908: 20, 25), and the same author's Dudley Hatton in *The Gold Wolf*: "Upon him alone, upon his genius the very stability of his business depended. His was the guiding brain, his the creative impulse. Let him draw back, and thousands might fall into that tremendous cataclysm" (Pemberton 1902: 73). Pemberton's financiers are charismatic to the point of being mesmerizing. However, whereas the social-critical tradition would treat this as a vulnerability in a financial system built precariously on individual will and influence, in Pemberton's narratives this is, rather, a form of romantic heroism. These portraits of successful, heroic financiers reveal, therefore, that the new economy and its consequent social changes did not provoke universal anxiety.

Whereas the adventure-capitalist Scarlett Trent strengthens his moral fibre in two kinds of jungle, Joel Thorpe in Frederic's *The Market-Place* is brutalized by his life as a capitalist entrepreneur. Frederic applies some of the techniques of naturalism to Thorpe's social and financial rise, and his accompanying moral decline,

representing business competition as a social-Darwinist struggle for supremacy that causes an observable physical deterioration in its participants:

> One noted most readily that the face had grown fuller in its lower parts, and was far less browned than formerly. The large, heavy countenance, with its square jaws masked now under increased flesh, its beginnings of a double-chin, and its slightly flabby effect of pallor, was no longer lacking in individual distinction. It was palpably the visage of a dictator. The moustache had been cut down to military brevity, and the line of mouth below it was eloquent of rough power. The steady grey eyes, seemingly smaller yet more conspicuous than before, revealed in their glance new elements of secretiveness, of strategy supported by abundant and confident personal force. (Frederic 1899: 229)

While the novel does not condemn absolutely the strenuous business activity required by the new economy, it shows it to be destructive, physically and morally. Thorpe comes to the City as an *ingénue* and soon learns the hard truths of modern business ethics. His funds disappear into the pockets of City parasites, such as a "sleek old braggart of a company-promoter":

> When at last this wretch was kicked downstairs, the effect had been only to make room for a fresh lot of bloodsuckers. There were so-called advertising agents, so-called journalists, so-called "men of influence in the City," – a swarm of relentless and voracious harpies, who dragged from him in blackmail nearly the half of what he had left, before he summoned the courage and decision to shut them out. (Frederic 1899: 22-23)

Like *Emmanuel Burden*, *The Market-Place* attempts an anxious analysis of the modern economy, presenting it as corrupting as well as fundamentally insubstantial. Just as Belloc's Barnett trades in perceptions rather than goods, so Thorpe, when he becomes successful as the promoter of the Rubber Consols Company, reveals his label of the

'Rubber King' to be misleading: "'There's no money in rubber. I'm entirely in finance – on the Stock Exchange – dealing in differences,' he replied, with a serious face" (Frederic 1899: 220-21). The rubber plantation that is the source of the commodity exists, but Thorpe "blithely" reveals to a colleague that "it isn't worth a damn" (Frederic 1899: 316). Thorpe is trading not in the material commodity, but in abstract values, i.e. the prices of the financial instruments used to raise capital for the company, the "differences" between the offer price and the traded price, and price fluctuations. He has, therefore, become what Hobson labels a "financier" – someone dealing in financial instruments enabling a business, rather than in the business itself – a category he distinguishes from "investors", "business-men", and "capitalists" (Hobson 1906: 238, 251). Financiers – such as Thorpe – are creating a speculative economy that is far riskier than is commonly supposed: "The whole system is one of betting: not indeed blind gambling, but speculation in which foresight and chance play parts of varying magnitude" (Hobson 1906: 243). Moreover, although financiers and the instruments they manage can perform a useful function, the financial system incentivizes corruption via the manipulation of prices: "The financial class, then, as distinguished from the main body of capitalists or amateur investors, grafts upon its legitimate and useful function of determining and directing the most productive flow of capital, three methods of private gain, each of which is a corruption and abuse of its true function" (Hobson 1906: 251). One of these methods is "Creating or stimulating fluctuations in prices in order to contrive corners or to practise concerted *coups*" (Hobson 1906: 252) – a practice that is evidently part of Thorpe's *modus operandi*. He uses his "corner" in the rubber-market to destroy a rival syndicate comprising mostly Jewish financiers: "in a splendid coup as a master thief he had stolen nearly a million" (Frederic 1899: 382-83).

The risks identified by Hobson are political as well as economic, allowing speculators to accrue power as well as wealth: "As 'credit' becomes more and more the vital force of modern business, the class that controls credit becomes more powerful and takes for itself as 'earnings' a larger proportion of the product of industry" (Hobson 1906: 255). Hobson's anxieties about the new economy are reflected in Frederic's novel, which implies that the new economy is morally corrupt as well as unstable. It charts Thorpe's moral decline partly through his relationship with Lord Plowden, an impoverished aristocrat, who joins him as a business partner and becomes estranged as Thorpe's increasingly unscrupulous management of his Rubber Consols Company – he considers murdering a former colleague who knows some of his financial secrets – drives a wedge between the representatives of new and old money. However, Thorpe is not a passive or unknowing victim of the financial system, but a conscious, disillusioned yet accepting participant. His analysis of the system is the ideological core of the novel:

> 'Everything in the City is cruel,' he assured her with a light tone. 'All speculative business is cruel. Take our case, for example. I estimate in a rough way that these fourteen men will have to pay over to us, in differences and in final sales, say seven hundred thousand pounds – maybe eight hundred. Well, now, not one of those fellows ever earned a single sovereign of that money. They've taken the whole of it from others, and these others took it from others still, and so on almost indefinitely. There isn't a sovereign of it that hasn't been through twenty hands, or fifty for that matter, since the last man who had done some honest work for it parted company with it. Well – money like that belongs to those who are in possession of it, only so long as they are strong enough to hold on to it. When someone stronger still comes along, he takes it away from them. They don't complain: they don't cry and say it's cruel. They know it's the rule of the game. They accept it – and begin at once looking out

> for a new set of fools and weaklings to recoup themselves on. That's the way the City goes.' (Frederic 1899: 204-05)

Thorpe sets out a moral criticism of the diversion of resources from industry to finance that Hobson had described five years earlier, representing the operations of financial markets as a kind of legalized theft in contrast to the "honest work" of productive industry. However, Thorpe's perceptiveness and disillusionment does not prompt his disengagement from the financial class (although at the end of the novel he redeems himself to an extent by becoming a philanthropist and recognizing the superior business ethics practised by his sister who runs the family bookshop). Significantly, when proposing to a wealthy widow, Thorpe chooses the language of the boardroom: "'if I decide to form another Company, a very small and particular Company – if I should decide to form it, I say – could I come to you and ask you to join that Board?'" (Frederic 1899: 175). Thorpe, therefore, sees love and marriage as an extension of his business operations, confirming the corrosive moral effect of financial competition.

A marker of the difference between the social criticism of works such as *The Market-Place* and the populist tradition is how financial crime and immorality are situated in relation to society. Thorpe's moral decline is presented as emblematic of a wider social and economic corruption, but popular fiction tends to treat financial immorality as specific and individual. For example, Jacob Dyer in Pemberton's *The Impregnable City* (1895) – the tale, dedicated to one of the period's great popularisers, Alfred Harmsworth, concerning an island community of outcasts and criminals governed by a follower of Leo Tolstoy's 'Christian anarchism' – is a born swindler. He "eats enough for five men and drinks enough for seven", and his financial greed – "he has left two or three hundred widows and orphans penniless in London" – is of a

piece with his gluttony (Pemberton 1900: 43). Echoing Conrad's de Barral, the vain Dyer blames a conspiracy of false friends for his downfall:

> 'You don't know, perhaps, that I was a great man in England? […] I remember the day when my name was at the top of sixteen companies. […] There was a time when I made forty thousand in a week. How the champagne corks flew! […] I knew I couldn't face the conspiracy of rogues who had fawned upon me, and I left England, house and wife and child, and eleven hundred dozen of wines. There wasn't a finer cellar than mine in the kingdom.' (Pemberton 1900: 45)

On the island, Dyer is a moral threat to the utopian community in which he has sought sanctuary: he cannot resist betraying its location to the British and French governments, and the latter's navy besieges and invades the island. Dyer escapes retribution at the hands of those he has betrayed but is forced to scavenge on the island; the narrator eventually finds him, emaciated and dying, but even in this state Dyer cannot hide his moral baseness, as he considers betraying the island again to the French: "'We'll cheat 'em yet, by the Lord Harry! There's not a man worth a guinea-pig among 'em – not a man!'" (Pemberton 1900: 104). Swindling here is the expression of irredeemable personal baseness; criticism of the new economy is absent.

Populism and social criticism do not, in the period, generally go together. One exception to this is Cromie's *A New Messiah*, which combines the genres of science fiction and Stevensonian adventure fiction with some criticism of the new economy. Its central figure is a City financier, Leslie Zietsman, a presumably Jewish "company promoter, a company wrecker, and a financial swindler all round […] a member, and one of the heads, if not the head, of the most wanton murder society ever formed; a man of education; a man of culture; a good father, and an implacable scoundrel; a philanthropist, a cut-throat, a faddist, a farceur, a millionaire, and a few other things"

(Cromie 1902: 133-34). Zietsman is also an anarchist who seeks to bring about a world revolution by means of an international secret society (the New *Vehmgerichte*), a submarine, and a monster on an island. Into this improbable tale, Cromie inserts a speech by Zietsman to the 'Britannic Association' on the theme of "the root of all evil […] a plant most people desire to cultivate" (Cromie 1902: 130-31). In the speech, Zietsman attacks "the stupendous accumulation of money in the hands of a few, and the atrocious straits of the many" with arguments that recall Hobson's:

> The claims are heaping up, being heaped up by men who, never from their cradles to their graves, render an iota of service in lieu of them. And these claims – purely theoretical claims, purely hypothetical values, utterly worthless and preposterous paper tokens, endless rows of meaningless figures multiplying themselves by a hideous geometrical progression – are being met again and again by a foolish, a wickedly ignorant, an unthinkably stupid Society, until the burden under which it groans is greater than it can bear. (Cromie 1902: 159-60)

Zietsman's speech captures the main point of literary culture's arguments against modern capitalism – that it is founded upon speculation, a quest for monetary gain from the price fluctuations of "paper tokens" (i.e. share certificates) that have ceased to represent anything real. Aside from pointing to the social inequality that results, Zietsman's argument is a largely moral one: trading in figures is "theoretical", "hypothetical", "worthless", "meaningless". Cromie's strange work does not develop this criticism into a theme – Zietsman delivers his speech and the narrative moves on in its implausible and unstructured fashion – and its social criticism therefore seems anomalous in this fantastic tale. The uneasiness of Cromie's combination of populist genres with economic analysis – reminiscent of *The Inheritors* – suggests a fundamental incompatibility between these two modes.

Romances of Modern Commerce

Two fictional traditions can therefore be seen to have emerged by the Edwardian period in their reactions to the new economy. The social-critical, 'literary' tradition, exemplified by Belloc and Frederic, with its origins in the Victorian novel's reaction to financial enterprise, treats the new economy as amoral, insubstantial, and corrupting, as it incentivizes manipulation of abstract values for personal gain at the expense of weaker participants; the populist tradition, variously exemplified by Pain's witty tales and Pemberton's and Oppenheim's adventure stories, finds the new world of finance, in which swindling is individual not systemic, entertaining and glamorous. Perhaps the most prominent example of the literary tradition, which Conrad probably read during the composition of *Chance*, is Wells's *Tono-Bungay*, a dystopian satire loaded with imagery of degeneration and entropic waste, addressing what its narrator, George Ponderevo, describes as "the broad slow decay of the great social organism of England" (Wells 1994: 55). Like Belloc's Barnett, George's uncle Edward Ponderevo (Teddy) is both an innovative financier and a company-promoter. Teddy launches his business through private investment, as George hazily recalls:

> I retain an impression of a long credit and a share with a firm of wholesale chemists, of a credit and a prospective share with some pirate printers, of a third share for a leading magazine and newspaper proprietor.
> 'I played 'em off one against the other,' said my uncle. I took his point in an instant. He had gone to each of them in turn and said the others had come in. (115)

This start-up operation is not merely sharp practice, it is also fraudulent, as Teddy has pretended to have invested four hundred pounds "when in reality he hadn't 'five

hundred pence'" (116). A flotation follows and, like Belloc's Emmanuel Burden, George cannot understand its success:

> my uncle went to the public on behalf of himself and me (one-tenth share) and our silent partners, the drug wholesalers and the printing people and the owner of that group of magazines and newspapers, to ask with honest confidence for £150,000. Those silent partners were remarkably sorry, I know, that they had not taken larger shares and given us longer credit when the subscriptions came pouring in. […] £150,000 – think of it! – for the goodwill in a string of lies and a trade in bottles of mitigated water! Do you realize the madness of the world that sanctions such a thing? (138)

As George realizes, he and his uncle are selling something other than the contents of the bottles. George comments that 'Tono-Bungay' is built "out of human hope and a credit for bottles and rent and printing" (144).

Like Belloc's Barnett and Frederic's Thorpe, Teddy is creating something from nothing, and Wells makes clear that this is the new economy in operation, not an old-fashioned confidence trick: Teddy builds his insubstantial business through joint-stock companies. Teddy diversifies his business by acquiring Moggs and Sons and floating it as Moggs Limited, and then an ironmongery business which he floats as Domestic Utilities, telling George: "We mint Faith […] That's what we do. And by Jove we got to keep minting! We been making human confidence ever since I drove the first cork of Tono-Bungay" (198). Wells's criticism shares much with Belloc's: 'Tono-Bungay' and the M'Korio Delta Syndicate are emblematic of the new economy which is powered by gullibility, greed, and its own momentum, and in which the shaping of perceptions for financial gain is a new belief-system that is replacing religion. However, Wells goes further than Belloc by extending the significance of his narrative beyond economics into an analysis of the fundamentals of social relations. George

begins to see that Teddy's fraudulent conversion of faith into cash is turning one of the fundamentals of society against it:

> 'Coining' would have been a better word than minting! And yet, you know, in a sense he was right. Civilization is possible only through confidence, so that we can bank our money and go unarmed about the streets. The bank reserve or a policeman keeping order in a jostling multitude of people, are only slightly less impudent bluffs than my uncle's soaring prospectuses. (198)

However, while confidence is necessary for social stability, Teddy's "bluffs" are portents of a society hurtling towards catastrophe:

> The whole of this modern mercantile investing civilization is indeed such stuff as dreams are made of. […] Yet it seems to me indeed at times that all this present commercial civilization is no more than my poor uncle's career writ large, a welling, thinning bubble of assurances; that its arithmetic is just as unsound, its dividends as ill-advised, its ultimate aim as vague and forgotten; that it all drifts on perhaps to some tremendous parallel to his individual disaster… (198-99)

Conrad's description of *Tono-Bungay* as Wells's "serious novel" (*CL*4 142) is therefore apt. It was serialized in the same numbers of the *English Review* (December 1908-March 1909) that contained the first four instalments of Conrad's *Some Reminiscences*, demonstrating this novel's high-literary credentials and its close connection to Conrad and his milieu.[11] Indeed, there is evidence that Wells rather cruelly parodied Conrad in the figure of the captain of the *Maud Mary*, "a Roumanian Jew, with twitching excitable features" (Hampson 2012c: 281). A year after *Tono-*

[11] In its serial form, *Tono-Bungay* was subtitled *A Romance of Commerce*, a part-quotation of Edward Ponderevo's comment, "The romance of modern commerce, George!" (134). The sub-title is partly ironic, as traditional commerce has in the novel given way to the new practices of flotation, misleading advertisement, and financial speculation.

Bungay's serial publication, Conrad returned to writing *Chance*, after a five-year break from the novel, and also wrote 'The Partner', both of which bear the imprint of Wells's novel in subject matter, treatment, and scope. *Chance* attempts, like *Tono-Bungay*, an ambitious portrait of Edwardian society, in which the story of the rise and fall of a swindling speculator and company-promoter is also the revelation of social change and potential social disaster. Marlow tells us that de Barral is "a sign, a portent" (*C* 74), and a newspaper account of de Barral's fall, read by the Governess, reaches a similar conclusion: "'It is a deplorable sign of the times,' […] an austere, general rebuke to the absurd infatuations of the investing public" (107). Like *Tono-Bungay*, and other literary analyses of the corruption of society by the new economy, *Chance* anxiously puts the gullibility of the public at the centre of its account of de Barral's easy ascent. De Barral is "a danger to a moral world inhabited by a credulous multitude not fit to take care of itself" (243), and, as his trial makes clear, the multitude is complicit in its own deception:

> the fact of widespread ruin remained, and the resentment of a mass of people for having been fooled by means too simple to save their self-respect from a deep wound which the cleverness of a consummate scoundrel would not have inflicted. A shamefaced amazement attended these proceedings in which de Barral was not being exposed alone. (83)

Both de Barral and Ponderevo exploit the public by claiming to commodify abstract values. Ponderevo says he manufactures "faith" and "human confidence", while de Barral sells "Thrift", but what both are really doing is appropriating terms from moral discourse in a financial context. The irony implicit in the "Thrift Frauds" (85) takes *Chance*'s satire further than even *Emmanuel Burden* and *Tono-Bungay*. Like those earlier novels it shows the new economy to be built on the most insubstantial

foundations conceivable, but *Chance* sharpens its satiric bite by showing a moral virtue – "Thrift" was famously the title subject of Samuel Smiles's 1875 moral tract – being used to create and then disguise a massive financial deception dependent on the greed of its participants, who are promised "ten per cent on all deposits" (78), an unsustainably high rate of interest.[12]

In common with other literary writers – Bennett being a notable exception – Conrad manifests a general distaste for the making of money in his fiction that expresses itself in strong social criticism. Just as George Ponderevo comments in *Tono-Bungay* that "I cannot claim that a single one of the great businesses we organized added any real value to human life at all" (197), so *Chance* communicates a sense of futility about financial crime and, by implication, the economic system that has brought it into being. Indeed, *Chance* offers a more radical criticism than *Tono-Bungay* in that de Barral's frauds are pointless, whereas Teddy is able to enjoy his success, and at least begins to objectify it in "bricks and mortar" in his massive but unfinished mansion, until "the whole fabric of confidence and imagination totters" (Wells 1994: 245). In contrast, Marlow comments on de Barral's businesses that he "had had nothing out of them – nothing of the prestigious or the desirable things of the earth, craved for by predatory natures. He had gratified no tastes, had known no luxury; he had built no gorgeous palaces, had formed no splendid galleries out of these 'immense sums'. He had not even a home" (84). De Barral's lack of human substance match his lack of achievement: according to Marlow, his "overweening, unmeasurable conceit" is concealed under his "diffident manner", but in the dock "he lost his steadiness as if some sustaining illusion had gone to pieces within him suddenly", and his eyes are "faded neutral" (82). De Barral is thus revealed as one of Conrad's hollow

[12] This is higher than that offered by the Haymarket Bank in *Emmanuel Burden* although lower than the 12.5% return on preference shares in Frothingham's Britannia Ltd. in *The Whirlpool* (Gissing 1984: 6).

men. His behaviour in the dock veers between defiance, insolence and tears of self-pity or rage, before resuming "that unassuming quiet bearing which had been usual with him even in his greatest days" (82). Even the trial lacks interest and drama – "For all the outside excitement it was the most dreary of all celebrated trials" (83) – and Marlow sums up with a devastating indictment of de Barral and the system he represents: "There was something perfect in his consistent mediocrity" (84).

That de Barral's "mediocrity" is a fundamental criticism of a system rather than merely a man is confirmed by his own status as victim as well as perpetrator of the exploitation of gullibility. De Barral is at the mercy of the debased business ethics of the time, and becomes himself the "prey of all sorts of swindlers, adventurers, visionaries, and even lunatics" (81). The Orb Bank and the Sceptre Trust may be de Barral's creations, but the Patagonian harbour and docks, the quarries in Labrador, the Amazonian canning factory, the purchase of a principality in Madagascar are all "incredible transactions" which de Barral has been talked into undertaking (81). After his release from prison, de Barral has at least come to realize the degenerate ethics of this world of business: "I had no friends. What did I want with those people one meets in the City? The best of them are ready to cut your throat" (362). Furthermore, de Barral is not the only financier in the novel. Marlow's only glimpse of de Barral occurs at the Albany chambers of "a podgy, wealthy, bald little man […] a financier, too, in his way, carrying out transaction of an intimate nature and of no moral character" who "would have done business (a sharp kind of business) with the devil himself. Everything was fly that came into his web" (75). Although de Barral's business with this enigmatic figure is not disclosed, we can infer from this episode that de Barral is one of his victims, and even when in prison de Barral becomes the victim of this parasitic society: Fyne realizes that de Barral's cousin has agreed to take responsibility

for Flora because he "imagines de Barral has got some plunder put away somewhere" (174).

In his victimization, de Barral conforms to the type of swindler presented by Wells and Belloc. Teddy Ponderevo is besieged in his suite at the Hardingham Hotel by "a remarkable miscellany of people […] wonderful incidental, frowsy people" who call without an appointment, but who have to wait behind a further miscellany of those with appointments; all come with "projects' requiring capital which they hope the genius behind Tono-Bungay can provide (Wells 1994: 195-96). In *Mr Clutterbuck's Election*, a similar parasitism afflicts Clutterbuck after his accidental share-dealing windfall: invited into Park Lane society, Clutterbuck becomes the prey of Charlie Fitzgerald, an impoverished aristocrat, who takes his income from Clutterbuck before launching him, for his own purposes, into politics. The speculations into which de Barral is lured also resemble those foreign financial-colonial adventures scorned by Belloc – the M'Korio Delta Syndicate in *Emmauel Burden*, and the Manatasara Syndicate's concession upon the Upper Congo in *Mr Clutterbuck's Election*. In all three writers we can detect a belief in a universal gullibility – afflicting even the swindlers themselves – that shows the social criticism to be aimed at something deeper than the outward economic and social characteristics of the new economy: our hearts and minds are being corrupted by the new economy. Moreover, the corruption is not merely economic and social, but cultural: company promotion and the creation of joint-stock companies depended upon a form of cultural communication that aroused particular interest and anxiety amongst both literary and populist writers – advertisements.

"The Modern System of Advertising"

The frauds perpetrated by Teddy Ponderevo and de Barral depend upon techniques of persuasion that include several kinds of advertisement.[13] Advertising was fundamental to enabling the innovations of the new economy. For a start, a successful company flotation was dependent upon attracting investors, and, once a company had been capitalized in this way, the value of the company became determined by its share price; factors affecting the share price – notably dividends and the prospect of future profits – were themselves determined by both product sales and by perceptions of those products. A publicly quoted company therefore required advertising at all stages of its operations. However, in an economy where perception is critical to business success, the economic importance of the perception-shaping techniques of advertising meant that it functioned also as an enabler of the deception and crime that fed on economic expansion: as Hobson put it in *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism*, when a joint-stock company is being established, "the bright and solid prospects of the business are set out with consummate literary skill, every present defect or future risk carefully concealed; the whole glamour of the proposition is suddenly flashed before the face of the confiding public by a parade of full-page advertisements" (Hobson 1906: 247). Pain reflects these techniques (the company prospectus and newspaper advertisement) in his story 'Bluff': Charles Maddenham Boys sets up a fraudulent vanity publishing business, and, when exposure threatens, he seeks to invest his gains in another company promotion: "His aim was now to come out of the business with as much in hand as possible: you cannot get your Electro-therapeutic Necklace on the public without spending a good deal in pushing and

[13] Donovan (2005: 112-60) has covered in depth the traces left by advertising on Conrad's fiction. Rather than repeat elements of his excellent account, my contribution seeks to supplement it by connecting Conrad's treatment of advertising with that of his contemporaries.

advertising" (Pain 1904: 99).[14] Pain recognizes, then, that prospectuses and advertising are essential, modern business technique irrespective of whether the product is legitimate or fraudulent. Unlike his more literary contemporaries, however, Pain does not spell out the social-critical implications. Wells does so, charting Teddy Ponderevo's business operations from the invention of the Tono-Bungay product to the construction of his commercial and financial empire, with advertising enabling each stage. His nephew is persuaded to assist by the realization that his uncle is not the exception but the modern capitalist rule: "And then my eye caught the advertisements on the south side of 'Sorber's Food', of 'Cracknell's Ferric Wine', very bright and prosperous signs, illuminated at night, and I realized how astonishingly they looked at home there, how evidently part they were in the whole thing" (Wells 1994: 121). Teddy's business operation is, therefore, representative, not exceptional: Tono-Bungay is one amongst many patent medicines and health-foods that depended upon advertising to be adopted by gullible consumers. Exploiting gullibility is also the objective of the B.O.S. company's advertising operations in 'An Anarchist', a point which the story's narrator then generalizes: "the modern system of advertising […] proves to my mind the wide prevalence of that form of mental degradation which is called gullibility" (*SS* 146). As Donovan has shown, the story exposes an exploitative form of capitalism that fraudulently advertises processed food as health food, which Conrad based on the highly successful advertising campaigns for Bovril (Donovan 2005: 139-43).

In *Chance*, Conrad's satire on capitalism goes further than Wells's by showing that the advertisement precedes the product. De Barral begins his career as a clerk in a

[14] Cf. *The Secret Agent*'s narrator's reflection on Verloc having the "air common to […] the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines" (*SA* 16). Hampson (2012a: 103) discusses these references as "part of the advertising culture of contemporary journals and newspapers".

bank, and receives a kind of epiphany that leads to his meteoric rise: “Then one day as though a supernatural voice had whispered in his ear or some invisible fly had stung him, he put on his hat, went out into the street and began advertising. That’s absolutely all there was to it. He caught in the street the word of the time and harnessed it to his preposterous chariot” (*C* 78). The metaphor here implies the objectification of the word, which is exactly what occurs when de Barral creates “his first modest advertisements headed with the magic word Thrift, Thrift, Thrift, thrice repeated” (78) – not only an incantation (Donovan 2005: 156), but also having the illusion of a material fact. Nevertheless, Marlow’s metaphor of the “magic word” shows that he thinks advertising works on the mind like a spell, indicating a concern that it entails a loss of mental control, and on the part of the perpetrator as well as the victims, as suggested by Marlow’s comment that de Barral “had been carried way out of his depth by the unexpected power of successful advertising”. Moreover, de Barral is evidently unreformed by his fall and his prison sentence. He tells Flora: “the advice of a man of my experience is as good as a fortune to anybody wishing to venture into finance. The same sort of thing can be done again”, adding significantly: “The start is really only a matter of judicious advertising” (368).

‘The Partner’ (1911) similarly elides villain and victim in the figures of Cloete and George Dunbar, who perpetrate an insurance fraud by scuttling a ship jointly owned by Dunbar and his brother, Captain Harry, who drowns when the ship sinks. As Donovan has noted, Cloete is a writer of advertisements and his ability to persuade is the motor that drives the story’s tragic events (Donovan 2005: 147). Conrad shared Wells’s interest in, or distaste for, the trade in patent medicines: in his preface to Jessie Conrad’s *A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House* (1923), Conrad described the

vendor of patent medicine as "the quack of modern civilization" (*LE* 219).[15] The motive force of Cloete's plotting is a patent medicine, 'Parker's Lively Lumbago Pills' – he intends to use the proceeds of the swindle in a necessarily expensive advertising campaign. He gains little sympathy from the two narrators (the magazine writer and the stevedore whose words the writer reports), yet it is clear that Cloete is also a victim of the economic system he helps to operate. His "years in the States […] With some patent medicine people" (*WTT* 125), have, we infer, corrupted him to the point that he cannot but have "easy moral standards" to go with his "unscrupulously persuasive gift of humour (funny fellow), and adventurously reckless disposition" (*WTT* 129).[16] The story is characteristic of the period's literary response to the new economy in that the scheme which tempts Cloete beyond mere unscrupulousness is a company promotion in which "capital, capital to the tune of thousands" is required "to be spent with both hands on advertising". Like the investors whom Cloete would go on to persuade though his deceptive advertisers, Cloete has himself been deceived either by his city contacts or by himself: the scheme "could be turned into a great thing – infinitely better-paying than a gold-mine. Cloete became excited at the possibilities of that sort of business, in which he was an expert. I understood that George's partner was all on fire from the contact with this unique opportunity" (130). As in Pain's story 'Bluff', and *Tono-Bungay* – "We sold our stuff and got the money, and spent the money honestly in lies and clamour to sell more stuff" (134) – Cloete's operations are part of a self-reinforcing system of deception and exploitation: a criminal deception is perpetrated in order to fund advertising for a company flotation which is itself a

[15] Donovan (2005: 148) overlooks this but identifies numerous other hostile references in Conrad's letters and narratives.

[16] Cloete's American heritage and behaviour are consistent with fictional presentations of modern and unscrupulous business methods being trans-Atlantic at least in character if not in fact. Chesterton's 'Kalon', for example, speaks in "broad American" after he is exposed, and his headquarters building is "American in its skyscraping altitude" (Chesterton 1950: 193, 206).

deception. George Dunbar, meanwhile, weak and uxorious, is also both deceiver and deceived, betraying his other partner, his brother – the story's emblem of traditional morality.

In *Chance*, *Tono-Bungay* and 'The Partner', advertising represents new business ethics. It is an instrument not only to persuade but also to mystify consumers, in which it is so successful that it mystifies the producers as well; its effects are unstoppable and unpredictable, and create a degraded capitalist system characterized by pointlessness in *Chance* and wastefulness in *Tono-Bungay*. This is underlined by Wells's final chapter, in which George Ponderevo suggests that *Waste* would have been a better title for his novel of "activity and sterility" (Wells 1994: 346). [17] George then sums up: "Again and again in this book I have written of England as a feudal scheme overtaken by fatty degeneration and stupendous accidents of hypertrophy" (350), with modern capitalism being the bloated, cancerous outcome. George's choice of a body metaphor is ironically appropriate given his choice of a patent medicine as the novel's chief example of "the giving of nothing coated in advertisements for money" (197). The novel suggests that even when the new economy deals in something material, the product may in fact be worthless, or worse – with the cumulative effect of creating disease and abnormal growth in the body politic. Patent medicines in popular fiction may equally be shown to be swindles, such as 'Pelosia' in Clifford Ashdown's Romney Pringle story 'The Assyrian Rejuvenator', whose active ingredient is soil and whose prospectus claims it to be a cure for dyspepsia, but they tend not to be freighted with the emblematic significance of 'Tono-Bungay' and 'Parker's Lively Liver Pills'. Conrad's and Wells's positions may have been part of a wider intellectual concern at the social effects of advertising which Carey has

[17] As Wells would have been aware, *Waste* was the title of another work of Edwardian social criticism, Harley Granville-Barker's play written in 1906 and refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain.

suggested to be an expression of distaste at lower-class culture: advertisements for soap, purgatives, and indigestion pills became the main targets of the literary writer in the period, such as Gissing in *In The Year of Jubilee* (1894), "since they linked the classes to whom advertising appealed with dirt and unhealthy bodily functions" (Carey 1992: 105). Writing about advertising therefore takes its place in the period's literary culture alongside the effects of financial speculation as symptoms and causes of social degeneration. Carey's class-based argument does not explain, however, these attitudes in the light of the dependence of the magazines that published Conrad, Wells et al. on advertising revenue, a dependence evident in the quantity and range of advertisements even in a 'purist' production such as the *English Review*. The appearance of social-critical, literary fiction alongside magazine advertisements suggests that the attitudes towards advertising in the former may reflect anxiety at the proximity of fiction and advertising rather than simple distaste on the basis of class.

Moreover, these attitudes towards advertising were not universal amongst literary writers. Arnold Bennett was fascinated by advertisements and incorporated them into his fiction as emblems of the poetry of modern life. *Buried Alive* (1908) has Britain's most celebrated painter, the cosmopolitan aesthete Priam Farll, assuming the identity of his valet and establishing himself as a lower-middle-class resident of Putney, where a new world of ordinary beauty becomes evident to his artistic eye – including the advertisements of the Upper Richmond Road:

> Priam Farll never tired of the phantasmagoria of Upper Richmond Road. The interminable, intermittent vision of food dead and alive, and of performers performing the same performance from everlasting to everlasting, and of millions and millions of cigarettes ascending from the mouths of handsome young men in incense to heaven – this rare vision, of which in all his wanderings he had never seen the like, had the singular effect of lulling his soul

> into a profound content. […] Yes, Priam Farll had seen the world, but he had never seen a city so incredibly strange, so packed with curious and rare psychological insight as London. And he regretted that he had not discovered London earlier in his lifelong search for romance. (Bennett 1976: 88-89)[18]

Bennett's gentle irony, quoting Psalms 90 and 103 ("everlasting to everlasting"), suggests that advertising has become a transcendent force supplanting religion in Farll's consciousness (or "soul"). Farll is cheered even by advertisements for patent medicines: he notes "a cure for indigestion so large that it would have given ease to a mastodon who had by inadvertence swallowed an elephant" (Bennett 1976: 88).

This debate about the effect and function of advertising in the new economy was evident in popular genres as well as literary fiction. In 'The Affair of the Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Co., Limited', Arthur Morrison's Horace Dorrington investigates the fraudulent flotation of a bicycle manufacturing business that is doing nothing more than attaching new labels to standard machines. It opens with a passage explicitly linking the new economy, advertising – in this case, the use of company prospectuses to make exaggerated claims for products – and moral decline:

> Cycle companies were in the market everywhere. Immense fortunes were being made in a few days and sometimes little fortunes were being lost to build them up. Mining shares were dull for a season, and any company with the word 'cycle' or 'tyre' in its title was bound to attract capital, no matter what its prospects were like in the eyes of the expert. […] Sometimes the shareholders got their money's worth, sometimes more, sometimes less – sometimes they got nothing but total loss; but still the game went on. One could never open a newspaper without finding, displayed at large, the prospectus of yet another

[18] Carey positions Bennett's consistently sympathetic attitude towards advertising as a symptom of his rejection of the intellectual superiority that characterized literary culture in the period, noting for example that, by "selecting printing as the Clayhanger family business, he is able to plan his great novel and its sequels around typography's advance into the era of mass culture" (Carey 1992: 158).

> cycle company with capital expressed in six figures at least, often in seven. (Morrison 1897: 153-54)

Dorrington confronts the swindler behind the company but instead of bringing him to justice, demands that he divides the proceeds with him. This and the other stories in the saga reveal a white-collar criminal underworld, in which even the detectives operate behind fraudulent company advertisements. A more striking visual method of advertising is used by the American swindler posing as the mystic 'Kalon' in Chesterton's 'The Eye of Apollo': Kalon's Victoria Street skyscraper is emblazoned like a dollar bill with "an enormous gilt effigy of the human eye, surrounded with rays of gold, and taking up as much room as two or three office windows" (Chesterton 1950: 193). The linking of advertising, finance, and deception is obvious. This challenges further Carey's thesis of a class-based distaste: anxiety about the social effects of advertisement was not confined to literary or 'higher-class' writers, but permeated popular and literary writing alike.

Conclusion: "But what does a silly sailor know of business?"

Chance offers us a choice between two ethical systems – de Barral's cut-throat world of financial speculation and the professional world of the merchant navy – including, above all, Captain Anthony's ship, the *Ferndale*.[19] This dichotomy – of the debased world of intangibles against the dependable reality of ships and their cargoes – partly explains why the mediocre de Barral in the third chapter of Part One becomes the sepulchral villain 'Mr Smith' of the sixth chapter of Part Two. De Barral is able to succeed in the world of business, albeit temporarily, despite having, as Marlow puts it,

[19] As Attridge (2010: 278) astutely comments, Conrad's approval of the professionalism of the Merchant Marine, and the rigours of its language and bureaucracy, was mixed with "a wry scepticism" that shows he appreciated its limitations.

"never any glory or splendour" (*C* 75); when Marlow sees him, in the financier's chambers in the Albany, he thinks him "a cross between a bookmaker and a private secretary" (77). Marlow wants us to think that he has seen through de Barral, which clearly his investors had failed to do, but even here the portrait is critical but not condemnatory. On the *Ferndale*, 'Mr Smith' may have changed his name and hidden his past from those aboard except his daughter and son-in-law, but his real vocation is obvious, at least to Franklin, who remarks on his resemblance to a "pea-and-thimble chap" at the Derby (299) and later describes 'Mr Smith' as a "thimble-rigging coon" (307).[20]

The dichotomies of sea versus City, merchant navy professionalism versus the debased shore-based professions of finance, journalism and others, are clearly part of *Chance*'s design from the opening chapter when we are introduced to a world that shuns deception. St. Katherine's Dock House, where Charles Powell is examined and where he is later offered his first berth on the *Ferndale*, is associated strongly with the highest professional and ethical standards. Charles Powell has to pass an examination before he can even be considered for a job, Captain Anthony cannot sail until the *Ferndale*'s Articles are signed and witnessed, and Mr Powell, despite his evident seniority, is concerned to ensure he does not commit even a technical breach of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1854, by "procuring a berth for a sailor". As Charles Powell observes: "That clause was directed of course against the swindling practices of the boarding-house crimps. It had never struck me it would apply to everybody alike no matter what the motive" (*C* 14). Legislation is therefore in place to counter in the world of the sea the kind of swindling practices that are pervasive in the city, which,

[20] Thimblerig: "A swindling game usually played with three thimbles and a pea which was ostensibly placed under one of them; the sharper then challenging the bystanders to guess under which the pea had been placed, and to bet on their choice; a cheat similar to the *three-card trick"* (*OED*).

Powell suggests, is not as civilized as it might appear. Attempting to board the *Ferndale* at night, Powell finds himself outside the docks with their "large iron gates in a dead wall", and glimpses "human shapes appearing mysteriously […] wary in their movements and perfectly silent of foot, like beasts of prey slinking about a camp fire" (25). Powell leaves behind the menacing, criminal wilderness of the London street when he gains entrance to the dock, where the *Ferndale*'s gear "inspired me with interest and respect; […] the whole thing looked powerful and trustworthy" (29).

Chance, then, satirizes business ethics in part by contrasting the morality of the city – and the City – against a superior, alternative value-system. In *Tono-Bungay*, the equivalent value-system is science. George is increasingly drawn to researching aerodynamics – a hobby that ultimately enables him and his uncle to escape their creditors temporarily – as an alternative to supporting his uncle's speculations. Earlier in the novel they argue over the respective moral and practical advantages of business and science. Teddy's arguments are predictably materialistic: "See what the world pays teachers and discoverers and what it pays business men! That shows the ones it really wants!" (Wells 1994: 119). De Barral's question – "But what does a silly sailor know of business?" (*C* 385) – exposes the moral gulf between the City and the sea. What *Chance* leaves out is the obvious but artistically inconvenient fact that the merchant navy would not have existed without the financial system that enabled global trade. The *Ferndale*'s cargo of dynamite and gunpowder, destined for Port Elizabeth, is presumably meant for the gold and diamond mines that had prompted a speculative mania – a mania that, as we have seen, ensnared Conrad amongst many others. Cargoes of any description could not even have left port without the complex network of merchant banks, bill brokers, and marine insurance agencies which were as much a

part of the merchant navy's support structure as the Shipping Office in St. Katherine's Dock House, and serviced Britain's trade with its empire and beyond.

Chance criticizes the new economy but it does not pretend to be a textbook describing and analysing that economy. Marlow admits that his narrative has been stripped of "business verbiage and financial jargon" (80). A few pages on he becomes unable to explain how de Barral perpetrated his various frauds and offers metaphors rather than analysis: "I don't understand these things much, but it appears that he had juggled with accounts, cooked balance sheets, had gathered in deposits months after he had ought to have known himself to be hopelessly insolvent, and done enough of other things, highly reprehensible in the eyes of the law, to earn for himself seven years' penal servitude" (85). Later, Fyne explains how de Barral's financial empire was dismantled within twenty-four hours, but Marlow cannot reproduce the explanation, admitting: "I don't understand these matters very well" (92). Recounting the "dull affair" that is de Barral's trial, Marlow quotes the pressman as saying "book-keeping of The Orb and all the rest of them was certainly a burlesque revelation," but that "the public did not care for revelations of that kind" (86). This, we might presume, helps to explain why the novel avoids the detail of financial chicanery. But it also explains why de Barral succeeded in executing such monumental swindles: the public is not only gullible, but also wilfully ignorant; by admitting his ignorance, and withholding the details that would only bore his listeners, Marlow makes himself and the reader complicit in the public's ignorance.

Similarly, George Ponderevo, despite being his uncle's business partner, is able to recall only vaguely Teddy's methods at the outset of his financial adventure:

> That sort of development is not to be told in detail in a novel. I have, indeed, told much of it elsewhere. It is to be found set out at length, painfully, at length,

> in my uncle's examination and mine in the bankruptcy proceedings, and in my own various statements after his death. Some people know everything in that story, some know it all too well, most do not want the details; it is the story of a man of imagination among figures, and unless you are prepared to collate columns of pounds, shillings and pence, compare dates and check additions, you will find it very unmeaning and perplexing. (Wells 1994: 192-93)

There are some texts of the period which do, indeed, register, if not collate, "pounds, shilling and pence": Chapter X of *Emmanuel Burden*, for instance, details the flotation of the M'Korio Delta Development Company, quoting its share price and its fluctuations, and identifying how much certain investors made from their deals. However, by and large, the Edwardian novel of finance spares the reader the details, choosing instead to assert the wrongs of modern capitalism, or present them through metaphor.

Money, therefore, highlights some of the limitations of fiction as a mode of representation. It is too fundamental to our changing lives to be ignored, but also too much of a "dull affair" to be represented in accurate detail. As Brantlinger comments, the rise of realistic fictional techniques in parallel with the emergence of a modern economy suggest a "seeming triumph" over the challenge of representing reality ("mimesis"), but, as these examples demonstrate, even the most realistic fictions such as *Tono-Bungay* – part of Wells's attempt to give the novel agency in politics and society – have to accept the gap between the represented and the real.[21] At the same time, Brantlinger suggests that fiction recognizes "the substantiality and power of money and commodities", so it simultaneously asserts its superiority over the real

[21] In 'The Contemporary Novel' (1911, republished in 1914 in *An Englishman Looks at the World*) Wells described "the scope of the claim I am making for the novel" as being "the social mediator, the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of laws and institutions and of social dogmas and ideas" (Wells 1914: 168).

world by being part of the "moral currency" of "culture", while being itself a commodified product, "exchangeable for money". This leads Brantlinger to consider both fiction and money as "representational systems relying on credit", concluding that "realistic fiction, at least, is always in some sense about money" and is "a perfect simulacrum of a social order based on nothing more substantial than public credit and 'speculative commerce'" (Brantlinger 1996: 144, 168) – a potentially uncomfortable resemblance for a literary purist. This might help to explain the negative portrait of the financial world that we find in literary fiction, and the rather more positive and optimistic view of populists like Oppenheim and Barry Pain. In a sophisticated analysis, John Attridge (2010) makes a similar point in relation to Conrad, drawing an analogy between a monetary system's basis in trust and Conrad's appeal to "verisimilitude" as a mark of trustworthiness that distinguishes his fictions from debased cultural commodities such as advertising. Attridge quotes *A Personal Record*: "And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellow-men's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history?" (*PR* 15). In other words, Conrad argues, fiction can be more real than reality. Attridge draws attention to Marlow's "rather gleeful refusal to explain de Barral's fantastic success" as "a marked lacuna in the novel's otherwise tightly-woven fabric of verisimilitude" (Attridge 2010: 273), an exceptional departure from the novel's careful examination of human motivations and cause-and-effect, attributable to the fact that it is the dishonest manipulation of advertising that explains de Barral's success. However, while Attridge is right to show that this lacuna is a break in the fabric of "verisimilitude", it is not as exceptional as he suggests: Marlow repeatedly disavows interest in and knowledge of the financial world, as we have seen, and there are many

other lacunae (the most celebrated being Flora's letter to Mrs Fyne).[22] *Chance* is a novel that draws attention to the limits of representation, while implying the trustworthiness of fiction over other forms of representation by denigrating journalism as well as advertising and finance.[23]

Conrad's objections to modern capitalism, advertising, and other techniques of persuasion therefore have an artistic as well as moral dimension. De Barral's swindling is dependent upon what Marlow calls "the power of words", illustrating Conrad's fascination with and anxiety about eloquence that characterizes, amongst other eloquent figures, Kurtz in 'Heart of Darkness'. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, discussing 'An Anarchist', has drawn attention to an ambivalence in Conrad's attitude towards the "sister art" of advertising – "the better it is, the more insidious it becomes" – adding that such "rhetorical persuasion" is not only "dangerous" but also, for the writer, "seductive" both financially and in reaching an audience (Erdinast-Vulcan 1999: 115-16). Donovan also reminds us that Cloete is a storyteller, only his stories are amoral: "And he didn't think much of consequences. These patent-medicine chaps don't care what they say or what they do. They think the world's bound to swallow any story they like to tell" (*WTT* 155). A similar anxiety is evident in *Tono-Bungay*: as we have seen (p. 295 above), George Ponderevo lets slip that his Uncle's story was that of "a man of imagination among figures". Conrad's answer to this problem, which we can infer from comparing 'The Partner' with his celebrated artistic manifesto in the 'Author's Note' appended to the final instalment of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* in

[22] See Hampson (1992a). Susan Jones (2007: 108-09) also suggests that Flora herself constitutes a modernist "gap" in the narrative. Jones goes on to suggest, with persuasive textual evidence, that for book publication Conrad removed passages from the serial version that explained Flora's conduct in order to make her motives and actions more opaque.

[23] Charles Powell condemns "newspapermen […] who never by any chance gave a correct version of the simplest affair" (*C* 4), while Marlow asks rhetorically in relation to the pressman's lack of interest in the financial details of de Barral's crime: "Is it ever the business of any pressman to understand anything?" (*C* 87).

the *New Review* of December 1897, appears to be a simple one: it is the intention behind the fabrication that matters. For the salesman-storyteller, the selling is the point of the lying, whereas the literary artist is engaged in a "sincere endeavour", so what might appear to be an untruth – a story – can take "the aspects of matter" and "the facts of life", and bring out "the very truth of their experience" (*NN* xlvii, xlix). Or, as Conrad put it to Cunninghame Graham in 1898, "I never could invent an effective lie – a lie that would sell, and last, and be admirable" (*CL*2 60). Conrad does not spell out what an insincere endeavour might be, but fiction written primarily for commercial success, alongside advertising and journalism, are likely candidates.

However, Conrad's discomfort with fictional persuasion was not so easily resolved. For obvious reasons, the tension between artistic integrity and commercial success preoccupied Conrad, as we have seen, with varying degrees of intensity throughout his literary career. For example, his correspondence with J.B. Pinker – a salesman working on behalf of literary talent – shows Conrad at times protesting his fiction's market value and following anxiously its fluctuating fortunes in the literary market-place. *Chance* reveals that tension in the dual identities of de Barral/Mr Smith, who personifies the dual nature of this 'Tale of Two Parts': a sceptical exploration of systems, values, and identities is combined with a modern fairy tale – although, as Susan Jones has shown, the Damsel and the Knight do not play their allotted parts in the traditional way (Jones 1999: 113), the villain is, by the end, reassuringly true to type. Elsewhere, Jones has shown that *Chance* accommodates several generic modes – New Woman novel, romantic serial, melodrama – into a complex fiction, peopled by elusive characters, who have sceptical views of contemporary political or social questions and have limited control over or knowledge of events: "While *Chance* still suffers from enduring critical assumptions about its 'inferior' status as romance, I

believe that the textual history of the novel makes it look less like a capitulation to market forces than an initiation of an astute and highly modernist response to them" (Jones 2007: 116). However, whilst the complexity of the novel's engagement with genre is in my view beyond doubt, it is also possible to read *Chance* as progressing towards a simpler and more commercial fictional mode. It culminates, unusually for one of Conrad's novels, with a happy marriage, and its melodramatic climax sees an attempted murder swiftly followed by the villain's suicide.

De Barral is as we have seen an emblematic figure as well as a modernist interpretation of his equivalents in nineteenth-century fiction, his hollowness reflecting both the superficiality and vacancy of modern capitalism, and scepticism about the knowability of human personality. When he reappears as Mr Smith, however, he is a rather different figure. His presence on board the *Ferndale* unsettles the crew, and his malevolence is sufficiently obvious for young Powell to keep a secret, voyeuristic vigil over his Captain's quarters; in the resulting confrontation, Mr Smith emits "a triumphant chuckling sound" which gives Powell "the shudders" and a "chill down the spine" (*C* 428-29). Foiled in his murderous scheme, Mr Smith raves of plots and treachery and takes the poison he intended for Roderick Anthony. This is the act not so much of the disgraced swindlers of fact and nineteenth-century fiction, but of a villain from melodrama whose presence must be removed from the stage to allow the happy reconciliation to be completed. Mr Smith, indeed, resembles the swindler of Pemberton's *The Impregnable City*, Jacob Dyer, who cannot stop plotting to enrich himself and inflict misery on others – a villain pure and simple, neither the symptom nor the symbol of a degenerating society. By turning his modernist criticism of the modern capitalist economy into a melodrama, Conrad reaches an accommodation with the literary market-place. This contrasts with but does not negate the novel's mode of

social criticism and satire, thereby illustrating the novel's capacity to be both *avant-garde* and populist.

Conclusion:

Conrad's Literary Experiments

Considering Conrad's presentation of financial crime has taken us back to where we began – the literary marketplace. It is perhaps appropriate to end this analysis with *Chance*, the novel whose commercial success used to mystify critics – Cedric Watts, for instance, finds *Chance* "remarkably disappointing" and not "obviously popular in its nature" (qtd. in Jones 2007: 106). Recent work by Susan Jones (1999, 2007) in particular has demonstrated that, far from being an anomaly, the novel's commercial success was a result of several factors, including the commercial opportunities from Conrad's contract with the American publisher Gordon Bennett, the *New York Herald*'s marketing and positioning of the serial in the United States, a concurrent publicity campaign mounted by F.N. Doubleday's editor Alfred A. Knopf, and the text's response to the New Woman novel as part of its engagement more generally with the topical issue of feminism.[1] Moreover, *Chance*'s success did not happen overnight, nor was it, as David Trotter has suggested, simply the result of riding its "promotional luck" (Trotter 2001: 166): it was an outcome of Conrad and Pinker's sustained campaign to engage different segments of the literary marketplace, a campaign that is most clearly evidenced by their attempts to break out of the low-circulation, masculine periodicals like *Blackwood's* and into higher circulation publications such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *London Magazine* (Jones 2007: 104-06). *Chance*'s success was neither luck nor accident, but a reward for a carefully planned strategy of engagement with the literary marketplace in Britain and, increasingly, the US.

[1] For the contribution of Alfred A. Knopf to *Chance*'s success in the US, see Mallios (2010: 119-21).

It is therefore appropriate, or perhaps ironic, that Conrad's commercial breakthrough came in a novel that satirizes some of the very instruments of commerce that enabled the breakthrough in the first place, such as advertising, the creation of a product's or brand's reputation through print journalism, and market analysis. As Jones has demonstrated, what Conrad called his "girl-novel" was blatantly positioned, in content and marketing, to appeal to women readers, a constituency which Conrad had previously been accused of neglecting: in an open letter to the *New York Herald*, he stated he had "aimed at treating my subject in a way which would interest women" (*CL*4 531-32). This reminds us that the market for fiction, like most markets, is segmented, not homogenous. Conrad's recognition of this point lies behind numerous references to his analysis of the literary market, such as his "wish to reach another public than Maga's" (*CL*2 320-21, and p. 23 above). In other words, commercial success is not necessarily reached by appealing to a lowest common denominator, but by understanding and fulfilling the needs and interests of different market segments.

Cooking the Books

How, then, should we read the scorn that *Chance* directs against commercial practices? On one level, as I argued in Chapter Five, the novel distinguishes between different forms of commercial endeavour by assessing the intention behind them. De Barral's exploitation of a gullible public is cynical, even if he fails to enjoy the fruits of his swindling endeavours; the writer of fiction, if he or she is (to use a particularly resonant word for Conrad) sincere, is not exploiting his or her readers, but seeking to improve them. As we have seen, in his prefaces and essays Conrad repeatedly asserted that writing fiction is an ethical act: some might do it for status or money, but the sincere writer does it to communicate a vision or to tell a higher kind of truth. It

follows that the sincere artist has a responsibility to find an audience – not perhaps the largest possible audience, but large enough for there to be some kind of social benefit. With this assertion, Conrad effectively neutralizes the argument – which has nonetheless been made by critics who accord a privileged status to his mid-period novels and to only one or two later works – that to appeal beyond the "limited coterie" is a regrettable capitulation to populism.

On another level, *Chance* can be seen as dramatizing a deeply anxious concern about the ethics of writing and selling fiction. The literary market-place is inescapable for every writer but the most extreme purist – even Henry James and James Joyce sold their fiction to publishers and presumably wanted it to sell – and, for the literary author, commercial calculations are difficult to reconcile with nineteenth-century beliefs about the aesthetic and moral superiority of "art" over "business". To explore this further, we might usefully compare *Chance* with Galsworthy's *The Man of Property*, which is particularly concerned with the relationship between commercial instincts and artistic values. Galsworthy's novel has a very clear view about commercial morality: even when conducted in accordance with the law and standards of propriety – the Forsytes are not swindlers – business is petty-minded, exploitative, acquisitive, reductive, and frequently cruel. The Forsytes go to operas, and collect porcelain and oil paintings, but they know (in Wilde's phrase) the price of everything and the value of nothing: even their gifts to each other are regulated "as prices are arrived at on the Stock Exchange" (Galsworthy 1951: 16). Moreover, Soames Forsyte in particular is unable to conduct his emotional affairs in any other way: his business instincts dictate his acquisition of his wife Irene, and then his legalistic assertion of his marital rights (he is a solicitor by profession) by raping her. Moreover, his collection of oil paintings, an analogue to his 'collection' of the beautiful Irene, is only a

collection: he is unable to appreciate it aesthetically, and its value to him is simply the fact of possession. For Galsworthy, however, the fact that *The Man of Property* is itself a property (and indeed one that has commercially been rather successful over the years) is not something that should concern the reader: the novel's high-minded privileging of art suggests that we should consider the novel aesthetically and morally, and conveniently forget about matters such as the negotiations with publishers, the management of copyright, and the carefully nurtured relationships with opinion formers such as Edward Garnett (the novel's dedicatee) and commentators such as Joseph Conrad (whose notably even-handed notice was published in *Outlook*, 31 March 1906)[2] – all of which were an essential feature of ensuring that a volume was actually purchased by readers and libraries.

By contrast, the satirical energy that *Chance* directs against advertising, journalism, and branding confronts the reader with questions that unsettle the Galsworthian assumption of a clear distinction between business and literature. This is further exposed by the frequent appearance within the text of writers and readers.[3] In the serial version, the frame narrator is (as in 'The Partner') a magazine writer, setting up from the outset an intricate set of correspondences between storytelling and the production and consumption of literature. Conrad eliminates this in the book version, but retains a multitude of references to the reading of books that encourage us to consider the nature of the experience we are undergoing, the purpose of that experience, and the materiality of the objects in our hands. John Fyne has written "a little book called the 'Tramps Itinerary,' and was recognized as an authority on the footpaths of England" (*C* 37), while his wife Zoe Fyne has written "a sort of handbook

[2] *LE* 95-100.

[3] Helen Chambers estimates *Chance* features eleven individual readers and around fifty descriptions of acts of reading ('"Fine-weather books": Representations of Readers and Reading in *Chance*', paper given at the 38th International Conference of the Joseph Conrad Society UK, Bath, July 2012).

for women with grievances […] a sort of compendious theory and practice of feminine free morality" (65-66). Marlow is scornful: "It made you laugh at its transparent simplicity". However, other readers were evidently more impressed: Marlow later describes it as "the inflammatory book which was to blaze upon the world a year or more afterwards" (156). The Fynes have written text-books on aspects of modern living – pedestrianism and female emancipation – showing that books may have instrumental uses as well as being literary creations. This is also evident in Carleon Anthony having "an object" of his poetry, which is to "glorify the result of six thousand years of evolution" (38).[4] Furthermore, Fyne has made sense of Carleon Anthony's domestic tyranny by recourse to another influential book: he "seized with avidity upon the theory of poetical genius being allied to madness, which he got hold of in some idiotic book everybody was reading a few years ago" (184) – presumably an allusion to Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895).[5]

Marlow is a reader, not a writer, contrarily choosing to enjoy fine weather by sitting indoors with "a book in my hands and the murmured harmonies of wind and sun in my heart making an accompaniment to the rhythms of my author" (64). His country-cottage idyll suggests both the therapeutic, recreational value of a book's contents and the reassuring materiality of its form. Once more Marlow takes up a book: "a fine weather book, simple and sincere like the talk of an unselfish friend" (449-50).[6] Marlow again does not disclose the book's title, but we can be confident it was not *Chance*, a work of such technical complexity that even Henry James was

[4] For a valuable discussion of Carleon Anthony's resemblance to Coventry Patmore, see Duncan-Jones 1969. "Six thousand years" is an allusion to Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854), and refers to the believed extent of human history as derived from the study of scripture.

[5] Nordau's view of Conrad (or at least *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*) was – to Conrad's surprise – rather more positive (*CL*2 121).

[6] The Heinemann and Dent 1949 editions omit the passage that contains these quotations, which are present in the Methuen first edition (1914). The page reference here is to the World's Classics Edition (ed. Martin Ray, 1988) where the omitted text is present in Appendix A.

moved to criticize its lack of straightforwardness.[7] Marlow appears to exemplify what Wells deprecated in 1911 as the "Weary Giant theory" of novel reading, "a harmless opiate for the vacant hours of prosperous men" (Wells 1914: 150). However, Marlow – who tells the second part of the narrative in a room whose main feature appears to be a bookcase – apparently reads philosophy as well as "fine-weather books". His talk of "the latest books about laughter written by philosophers, psychologists" (283) is presumably a reference to Henri Bergson's *Le Rire* (1900), suggesting that Marlow shares some of his creator's intellectual interests. Roderick Anthony is another recreational reader, getting through all the volumes in Fyne's cottage in three days before spending his days "contentedly on his back with no other companion but his pipe" (154). Anthony has the *Ferndale* fitted with a bookcase, and it has on board at least three readers. One is Flora. Another is Powell who, like Marlow, finds companionship in a book that "he had already read a good many times" (401) after being unsettled by Franklin's profound unease at the state of affairs on the *Ferndale*. The third is Anthony. Powell's voyeuristic surveillance of Anthony's bedroom habits, immediately before the novel's climax, reveals that the captain does nothing worse than sipping brandy and reading a book, but this prompts Powell to express his solidarity with the menaced captain, and also to offer an explanation, or excuse, for his own "ugly spying": "Captain Anthony was a great reader just about that time; and I, too, I have a great liking for books. To this day I can't come near a book but I must know what it is about" (413). Powell discerns that it was "a thickish volume" with "small close print, double columns […] it was a history of some kind" (413). Marlow assumes that Anthony uses reading "as an opiate against the pain of his magnanimity

[7] 'The New Novel' (1914) (H. James 1948: 202-03)

which like all abnormal growths was gnawing at his healthy substance with cruel persistence" (416).

Books in *Chance*, then, are instrumental, in guiding, influencing, and informing; they are recreational, a form of leisure activity alongside yachting, pedestrianism, chess, and the other leisure activities featured in the novel; they are therapeutic, calming anxious minds; and they may even be exculpatory, in that they provide Powell with an explanation for his act of voyeurism – even if that explanation stretches credibility. The *Ferndale*'s sinister passenger, Mr Smith, by contrast, does not read: he "used to declare 'I am no reader' with something like pride in his low tones" (381), and the book that he is later described carrying is, we presume, Flora's. This is, obviously enough, another indicator of philistinism and general viciousness. However, as the swindler de Barral, books of a different kind were instrumental to his frauds: "The book-keeping of the Orb and all the rest of them was certainly a burlesque revelation" (86). These books are the accounts that de Barral "juggled" and the balance sheets he "cooked" (85). Even someone as unlettered as de Barral understands the power of the written word to confer spurious legitimacy, misrepresent facts, and deceive. This is evidently another reflection of Conrad's anxiety about rhetorical persuasion (see p. 297 above): by inviting us to consider fraud as a form of authorship, it connects the satire of finance and commercialism with the novel's repeated examination of reading and writing. When Conrad reviewed *The Man of Property*, he endorsed his friend Galsworthy's claim to artistic integrity and suppression of anything resembling commerce in his literary endeavours: after discussing the novel's subject, materialism, he goes on to assess its treatment, the "particulars which make up the intrinsic value of a work of art" (*LE* 98). When Conrad

approached similar themes in *Chance*, however, he chose not to rely on, or was unable to sustain, such a neat dichotomy: art and business have troubling resemblances.

Experiments and Genre

Conrad's uncertainty, or scepticism, over the boundaries between 'art' and business raises the question of the commodification of literature, discussed usefully by Brantlinger as mentioned in Chapter Five. If, instead of being works of 'art', books are seen as products sold in a market to generate income for producers (author, publisher, bookseller), they approach the status of commodities.[8] Writers and critics may protest that qualitative difference is, in writing, everything – and Conrad as a literary critic and as a commentator in 'Author's Notes' on his own work pursued this argument consistently – but not every reader might agree. Indeed, in defending the status of fiction, or at least a certain kind of fiction, as 'art', Henry James (1948: 7-8) acknowledges that this might be a difficult argument to sustain "in presence of the enormous number of works of fiction that appeal to the credulity of our generation, for it might easily seem that there could be no great character in a commodity so quickly and easily produced". In an era of mass production, the only argument left for a literary purist to justify the "art" in the "art of fiction" is to differentiate artworks from commodities by equating the latter not only with mass-production but also mass-consumption: fiction, writes James, "has been vulgarized, like all other kinds of literature, like everything else to-day, and it has proved more than some kinds accessible to vulgarization" (1948: 8). In his own purist pronouncements on the art of fiction – the Preface to the *Nigger of the Narcissus* for example – Conrad, as we have seen, follows his "cher maître" in distinguishing the good from the bad by invoking

[8] For further analysis of literary production in the period, see Feltes (1993), especially Chapter 1.

intangible qualities such as "sincerity" and "fidelity". And yet the books in *Chance* show repeatedly that reading can be a leisure activity, whether the book has the dense print of Roderick Anthony's history or is one that lulls with soothing rhythms and cadences. If, as *Chance* appears to accept, books exist for a range of reasons – to absorb leisure time as well as improve the reader or reveal truths about the universe – absolute distinctions between art and commodity will not always be clear.

Commodification is particularly relevant to genre fiction.[9] The existence, or construction, of a genre presupposes a consistency or conformity of theme or style, although Todorov helpfully reminds us that variation within genres is equally essential (Todorov 1990: 14). Recognition of books by their resemblance to other books became increasingly important as markets increased and authors and publishers recognized how that market was differentiated. This extended to the physical form of books, exemplified by Hodder & Stoughton's two-shilling 'Yellow Jacket' imprint of popular thrillers and romances, which published amongst others Baroness Orczy, E. Phillips Oppenheim (whose by-line was "The Prince of Storytellers"), and Edgar Wallace ("It is Impossible Not to be Thrilled by Edgar Wallace!") (Nash 2011: 11). The 'Yellow Jacket' imprint demonstrates two features of the positioning of fiction in the marketplace: the distinctive appearance of the volume reassured readers of the book's conformity with certain generic standards, as well as its (low) price, while the marketing of some 'Yellow Jacket' authors such as Oppenheim and Wallace showed that the series was nonetheless differentiated. The 'Yellow Jacket' imprint was the brand of a series of product ranges, within which the more prolific and successful product ranges had branding of their own (such as the famous target symbol that

[9] The Marxist critic Frederic Jameson's influential chapter on Conrad in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) sets out a paradigm for commodified and therefore "degraded" genre fiction which is, in a novel such as *Lord Jim*, juxtaposed with "contemporary modernism" (Jameson 1981: 206-19).

became Wallace's icon in the 1920s). Incidentally, Conrad was not, despite his purist disavowals, immune from such marketing practices by producers, as Donovan has shown: he authorized the use for publicity purposes of photographs taken for an interview by *Vanity Fair*, while an American newspaper showed no trace of irony in reporting that Conrad "is honest in his dislike of publicity" in a full-page, illustrated interview with the author (Donovan 2005: 117-18).

Conrad's engagement with genres, which I have attempted to demonstrate through his use of five character types, was a strategy that offered risk and reward. The risk was that he might damage the hard-won reputation for literary quality that he had gained not only by his aesthetic and technical achievements but also by his association with other cultural producers with a reputation for quality if not purism (editors like Henley, publishers like Blackwood's, magazines like *The Savoy*): participation in genre fiction might increase sales but reduce his cultural capital. The rewards, however, were not only increased sales but also an extension of his appeal beyond elite readers, or those who viewed him as the "Kipling of the Malay Archipelago", or a writer of sea-fiction (Simmons 2009: 60-61).

What I believe this analysis to have shown is that, in the fictions discussed here, Conrad navigated the market by a strategy of experimentation, by which I mean something wider than his admired innovations with, for example, narrative time or delayed decoding (Watt 1980: 168-80, 269-304). My conclusion is a slightly wider one. Firstly, Conrad's descriptions of his 'art' always emphasized subject as well as technique, and his experimentation lay in using innovative technique not as an end in itself but as a means to making something "new" or "modern" (to use two of Conrad's keywords in his letter to Blackwood of 31 May 1902 quoted above, p. 31) from subjects that were already of interest to his readers – and by subjects I mean not only

topics (e.g. terrorism) but also genres (e.g. novels about terrorism). The 'treatment' may be what distinguishes Conrad from his competitors in the marketplace, but it would be wrong to see it in isolation: innovative treatment and a "widely discussed subject" (to quote Conrad in 1907) together constitute the distinctively Conradian experiment. The experience of reading *The Secret Agent* is qualitatively different from reading late-Victorian or Edwardian detective fiction, and much of the difference derives from techniques such as the sustained use of irony as well its fascination with the philosophical and psychological dimensions of its characters. Secondly, Conrad also experimented in his choice of subject: the preceding chapters demonstrate, I believe, that Conrad examined and tested the market to determine what might attract the attention of readers. In doing so, his decisions were influenced by judgments of topicality as a route to market success. For example, as I showed in Chapter Four, Conrad noted with satisfaction that anarchism had become topical just as he had begun to write about it. Conrad was also alert to what other writers were producing and how much success they achieved, which helps to explain why his generic interests expanded from the 'imperial romances' he absorbed and subverted in the nineteenth century, to include newer, urban genres such as espionage and detective fiction.[10] His somewhat grudging comment in 1902 on the extraordinary commercial success of Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (see p. 48 above) was followed four years later by his own version of a detective story that has, as I showed in Chapter One, clear affinities with the Sherlock Holmes saga. In *Chance*, he took several topical themes – economic change and financial crime, which I discussed in Chapter Five, but also topical questions of gender, work, and leisure – and combined them in a generically complex novel that partakes of the Edwardian novel of finance, detective

[10] See Dryden (1999: 193-99).

fiction, New Woman fiction, social satire, sea-stories, and melodrama. Even *Under Western Eyes*, perhaps the most purist of all of Conrad's works, can be seen as a response to the emerging genre of espionage fiction, as I showed in Chapters Two, Three and Four. And in this case, the experiment included the combination of that populist form with another kind of fiction being published at the time for an elite readership – Constance Garnett's translations of Russian novels.

Understanding Conrad's engagement with populist genres as experimentation helps us move on from discussions that seek to demonstrate – unhelpfully in my view – the aesthetic superiority of Conrad's fiction or of 'literary' fiction in general. If genre fiction is inevitably inferior to Conrad's work, as Cedric Watts has claimed with respect to detective fiction, and Keith Carabine has suggested with respect to espionage/terrorism fiction, we might ask why Conrad bothered to draw on those genres in the first place. Whilst it is clear that *The Secret Agent* achieves effects that are very different from the effects of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and 'The Empty House', to dismiss Conan Doyle's work without bothering to analyse or appreciate it is, I believe, unworthy of the critic. Researching this thesis has entailed reading a large quantity of genre fiction, most of which has, in one way or another, been enjoyable, although some has, frankly, been a chore; but it is impossible to come through the experience without the recognition that genre fiction, like literary fiction, may be aesthetically and technically accomplished, entertaining, and challenging, or it may be none of those things. Chesterton made the point in 'A Defence of Penny Dreadfuls' that "One of the strangest examples of the degree to which ordinary life is undervalued is the example of popular literature, the vast mass of which we contentedly describe as vulgar" (Chesterton 1901: 8), implying a counter-argument to Henry James's thesis that vulgarization means both commodification and aesthetic inferiority.

Orwell acknowledged Chesterton's essay in his own essay 'Good Bad Books' (1945), remarking that the Sherlock Holmes and Raffles sagas, as well as R. Austin Freeman's early Dr Thorndyke stories, and Barry Pain's fictions, were "[o]bviously outstanding examples" of fictions with "no literary pretensions" but which have remained "readable": "Who has worn better, Conan Doyle or Meredith?" (Orwell 1970: 37). While even Orwell sees such works as "'escape' literature", his analysis nonetheless sceptically, and helpfully, challenges assumptions that "superiority" can be established by a "strictly literary test", insisting that "art is not the same thing as cerebration" (41). In a novelist, skill at storytelling is more valuable than "intellectual refinement" (Orwell 1970: 39). Comparing Conrad and Conan Doyle is not, inevitably or by necessity, to the latter's detriment, and we might follow Orwell in considering that Conrad and Conan Doyle have in common skills in storytelling that, if the reading tastes of later generations are anything to go by, some of their purist rivals lacked. Although, as we have seen, Conrad repeatedly asserted that he brought modernity, ethics, and technique to the writing of fiction, from his son's recollection what he valued most was "a good story" (see p. 11 above).

Orwell makes an important point in distinguishing "cerebration" from storytelling, but it is the combination of the two in Conrad's fiction that perhaps accounts more than anything else for the wealth of critical attention it continues to receive. A comparative narratological examination of Conrad's work and various kinds of popular fiction is one route I did not take and which may, I believe, pay dividends: such a study might uncover surprising affinities in narrative technique. By focusing on character types rather than technique, I have demonstrated affinities in content rather than form, and here Conrad's "cerebration" provides examples of both similarity with and difference from genre fiction: the political, philosophical and psychological

content of Conrad's fiction, which has attracted critical admiration for decades, may in different ways and in different texts either distinguish his work from popular fiction or illuminate common ground. To take, as an example, informers from Chapter Two, I have demonstrated that Conrad wrote his 'political' novels and stories in a fictional tradition that engaged in contemporary debates on the proper limits of state surveillance. This tradition included populist works such as Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men* as well as highly literary ones such as Hueffer's *Fifth Queen* trilogy, which transposed those topical debates to a sixteenth-century historical setting. The common ground is the fact that Conrad, Hueffer, the Rossettis, Wallace, William Le Queux, Kipling, and Erskine Childers all engaged in various ways in the debate. The difference lies, in part, in the conclusions drawn: Conrad in *The Secret Agent* appears to agree with anti-establishment polemicists, and Hueffer and the Rossettis, in taking a generally hostile view of domestic espionage, while the populists tended to accept espionage as a necessary feature of modern policing.

Of course, the intensity and sophistication of the debate may vary, and I would accept that there is a great deal more depth and subtlety in Conrad's handling of the character type than, say, Le Queux's, whose police informer enters and is made to exit the text without a great deal of attention to aesthetics or ethics. However, this is not to say that depth and subtlety is unique to Conrad's treatment: Wallace's handling of the character type, for example, is very clearly part of a sophisticated interrogation of the balance of liberty and security in the Edwardian state. In this case, the difference lies in the psychological intensity and depth of Conrad's handling of the character. Sevrin is but one character in an 8,500-word story yet Conrad's exposure of what psychologists would call his 'cognitive dissonance' is vivid and powerful, while Conrad's handling of the psychological consequences of Razumov's multiple betrayals

takes this to depths previously paralleled only rarely in British fiction. In other cases, Conrad's fictions operate on a philosophical level that is rare, but not unknown, in genre fiction. Conrad's Chief Inspector Heat, for example, is analysed by the narrator in ways unimaginable in most detective fiction: as I pointed out in Chapter One, Heat is placed in an epistemological frame that would have been too abstruse to contain Sherlock Holmes or Lady Molly. Even so, we should pause before jumping to conclusions: Chesterton's Father Brown, for example, is a subtle and complex creation, designed to engage metaphysical questions of faith, providence, and salvation. But Father Brown aside, the genre does not usually examine its detectives in terms of information, knowledge, and wisdom as *The Secret Agent* does.

A further advantage of examining Conrad's work in terms of its affinity with genres is that it reminds us of the sheer range of his work. It is no more than a statement of the obvious to anyone familiar with the three novels I have discussed in detail that they differ greatly in tone, technique, structure, aesthetic effect, and ideological purpose. However, evaluating them in terms of their proximity or otherwise to genre fiction helps illuminate how they achieve such variety of effect, and to what purpose. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, for example, Vladimir and Mikulin have the same employer and very similar jobs, and yet as fictional characters there are sharp contrasts. Vladimir, despite his hereditary victimization, is more villain than victim, exposed by the hero-detective and expelled from the pale of British (and European) society to return, we presume, to the barbarity of "Crim-Tartary". Mikulin, despite being a willing instrument of state repression, is human in his foibles and sensitivity, stoical, and ultimately a victim of the system he has loyally served. This contrast illuminates some of the wider differences between the two novels in, for example, genre, tone, and technique: the gently ironized Mikulin would not fit the

satire of *The Secret* Agent; if Vladimir were to represent the Russian state in *Under Western Eyes*, there might have been more justice in Garnett's charge – that infuriated Conrad – of Russophobic spite. While not exactly even-handed, the serious political analysis of *Under Western Eyes* requires at least some characters, on both the side of the state and the side of its enemies, who have depth, complexity, and humanity.

"I am modern"

In noting or even celebrating Conrad's distinctiveness, it is, finally, worth remembering that the resonances between Conrad's work and more commercial fictions by his contemporaries may exist for reasons other than the exploitation of commercial opportunity. Conrad's fictions have things in common with the work of his more commercially oriented contemporaries precisely because they were contemporaries. Consciously or otherwise, writers of fiction respond to what is happening around them, whether great events such as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, political and social developments such as the passing of the Aliens Act in 1906, or the enrolment of a significant proportion of the British population into the practice of share-ownership. The Russo-Japanese War directly stimulated Conrad's 'Autocracy and War' and helped to condition British cultural responses to Russian autocracy that, as we have seen, are evident in such dissimilar texts as *The Railway Children* and *Under Western Eyes*. The Aliens Act, and the debates over immigration from Eastern Europe to Britain that preceded it, prompted fictional considerations of the issues of migration and political violence from writers as diverse as Edgar Wallace and Conrad, and the novels that resulted exemplify the working out of ideological debate through the medium of fiction. The literary responses to the cultures created by the growth of limited companies and share-ownership were not confined to *Tono-*

Bungay and *Chance*, but penetrated the entertainments published in large-circulation magazines such as the *Strand* and the *Windsor*, including many examples of the period's most popular genre, the detective story.

This selection of responses from 'high' and 'low' literary culture to political and economic developments reminds us that works of fiction, whatever their commercial orientation, are part of a wider cultural landscape. It can, I believe, only benefit the literary or cultural critic to examine as much of that landscape as possible, and not to ignore or dismiss large areas of it on the grounds of preconceived and potentially spurious estimates of value. Whether we prefer Conrad or Conan Doyle, the one can provide *interpretative* value to the other, and help us understand better the relationships of both authors with their contexts. Reading side-by-side three novels published or serialized in 1905-06 – *The Secret Agent*, *The Czar's Spy* and *The Railway Children* – reveals surprising affinities that enable us to see more clearly how each text deals with the topic of Russian autocracy and its implications for British civic values. It also invites us to challenge the application of "ephemeral" to 'bad' writing only, as the cultural arbiter Ernest Baker did in his survey of public libraries (see pp. 33-37 above): ephemerality implies a concern with issues and tastes of the time, and Conrad's narratives are as concerned with the topical as any by his 'profiteer' contemporaries.

Conrad's protest to William Blackwood in 1902 that "I am modern" was an assertion of a position in the literary field intended to distinguish himself from those profiteers. His protest is important but should not be taken at face value: here and elsewhere, as Donovan (2005: 193-94) has shown, Conrad's disavowals of and occasional contempt for popular culture misdirect the critic and obscure the degree to which Conrad absorbed and appropriated popular texts and practices. What this thesis

– building on the work of critics such as Donovan and McDonald – has shown is that the literary field in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was more complex than some critics have allowed, that 'high' and 'low' literary culture at the time are not as easy to distinguish as might appear, and that Conrad's position in the literary field is problematic to say the least. Conrad's utilization of types and tropes from popular genres may be seen as a "requisitioning of popular modes […] for more serious purposes" (Hawthorn 2007: 152), or a subversion of these genres (Dryden 1999), or as a means of subverting the hegemonic assumptions that the genres inscribed (White 1993: 193, 203), but these critical stances require interpretation which in turn depends upon the detection of what may be very subtle technical or ideological differences. Moreover, Hawthorn's and Dryden's acts of interpretation are exactly that, and like all such acts, rest on assumptions about literary value and effect. Reading Conrad with, or against, a large quantity of commercial and non-canonical texts from the same period has led me to perceive his position in the field rather differently. Rather than occupying a static, purist position, Conrad's position seems to me to be dynamic and heterogeneous. Instead of taking the base metal of popular fiction and transforming it, via the philosopher's stone of what he called "treatment" or "method", into the gold of 'literature', Conrad's alchemy – his experimentation – created a much wider variety of effects: his fictions partake of popular forms as well as changing them.

The enrolment of Conrad into the "great tradition" ensured that the novels of Conrad's so-called "major phase" would become canonical, and therefore objects of critical study. More recent work has rehabilitated the early Malay fiction and (to a lesser extent) late novels and it is significant that some of the best work, by Dryden and White amongst others, has reawakened our interest in these more neglected texts by placing them in a tradition of imperialist adventure writing, explicitly challenging

Leavis's assumption that what made Conrad important was his position in a canonical "tradition" (White 1993: 2). But where Leavis's and White's studies, both groundbreaking in their own ways, coincide is their longitudinal perspectives on Conrad's relationship with other texts which is signified by the word 'tradition', even though White (1993: 2-3) seeks also to identify "the horizontal influences" as well as the "tradition he inherited as he first started to write". What this study has demonstrated is that a horizontal perspective incorporating genres other than adventure and travel writing can reveal features of how Conrad turned reading into writing, how he staked out not one but a range of positions in the literary field, and how his literary experimentation was a dynamic response not only to the nineteenth-century British and European traditions of fiction, travel and adventure, but also to the urban literary cultures of his time.

Annex A: Select Chronology (1885-1916) of Fictional Works Mentioned in the Text

1885

Tom Greer's *A Modern Dædalus* is published in London (Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh).

Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* is serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* and published in volume form the following year by Macmillan and Co.

Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's *More New Arabian Nights. The Dynamiter* is published in London (Longmans, Green & Co.)

1886

Grant Allen's *For Maimie's Sake. A Tale of Love and Dynamite* is published in London (Chatto & Windus).

1887

Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, appears in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*.

1889

The Career of a Nihilist by 'Stepniak' (Sergei Kravchinsky) is published in London (Walter Scott).

1890

Conan Doyle's second Holmes novel, originally entitled *The Sign of the Four*, appears in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. It is published in the same year in volume form by Spencer Blackett under the title *The Sign of Four*.

Rudyard Kipling's 'The Man Who Was' is published in *Macmillan's Magazine* and *Harper's Weekly*.

1891

The Sherlock Holmes saga continues with the first series of short stories, published in the *Strand Magazine*, and subsequently collected as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (London: George Newnes, 1892).

1892

The second series of the Sherlock Holmes begins in the *Strand Magazine*, collected as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (London: George Newnes, 1894).

The first of two parodies by Robert Barr of his friend Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, featuring the detective Sherlaw Kombs, are published in *The Idler* – the humorous magazine Barr co-founded with Jerome K. Jerome. The second parody follows in 1904.

1893

E. Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist; or, The Doom of the Great City* is published in London (Edward Arnold).

George Griffith's *The Angel of the Revolution. A Tale of the Coming Terror* is serialized in Pearson's Magazine and then in volume form in London by Tower Publishing Co. Ltd.

1894

William Le Queux's *The Great War of 1897* is published in London (Tower Publishing Co. Ltd.).

The first series of Morrison's Martin Hewitt stories is serialized in *Strand Magazine*, replacing the Sherlock Holmes saga after the latter's apparent death in 1893. Sidney Paget illustrated both the Holmes and the *Strand*'s Hewitt stories. This series is

published in book form as *Martin Hewitt, Investigator* (1894) by Ward, Lock and Bowden, Limited.

1895

The second series of Morrison's Martin Hewitt stories is serialized in *Windsor Magazine* and collected as *Chronicles of Martin Hewitt* (1895), published by Ward, Lock and Bowden, Limited.

Hume Nisbet's *The Great Secret* is published in London (F.V. White & Co.).

1896

Coulson Kernahan's *Captain Shannon* is serialized in *Windsor Magazine*. It is published in volume form by Ward, Lock and Co Ltd. in 1897.

The third series of Morrison's Martin Hewitt saga is serialized in *Windsor Magazine* and collected as *The Adventures of Martin Hewitt* (1896), published by Ward, Lock and Company, Ltd.

1897

Guy Boothby's *A Prince of Swindlers*, featuring the criminal detective Simon Carne ('Klimo') is serialized in *Pearson's Magazine*. The stories are published in volume form by Ward, Lock in 1900.

George Gissing's *The Whirlpool* is published in London (Lawrence and Bullen, Ltd.)

Arthur Morrison's series *The Dorrington Deed-Box*, featuring the criminal-detective Horace Dorrington, is serialized in *Windsor Magazine*. A volume with the same name is published by Ward, Lock the same year.

H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* is serialized in *Pearson's Magazine*. It is published in volume form by Heinemann in 1898.

1898

E.W. Hornung's Raffles stories first appear in *Cassell's Magazine* under the editorship of Max Pemberton. The stories then appear in three collections: *The Amateur Cracksman* (1899), *The Black Mask* (1901), and *The Thief in the Night* (1904). A Raffles novel, *Mr Justice Raffles*, appears in 1909.

E. Phillips Oppenheim's *Mysterious Mr Sabin* is published in London (Ward, Lock and Co.)

H.G. Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* is serialized in *The Graphic* (January-May). It appears in volume form in 1899, published by Harper and Co. Wells brings out a revised version as *The Sleeper Awakes* in 1910.

1899

Harold Frederic's *The Market-Place* is published posthumously in London (Heinemann), New York and Toronto (William Briggs).

William Le Queux's *England's Peril* is published in London (F.V. White and Co.)

Morley Roberts's *The Colossus. A story of to-day* is published in London (E. Arnold).

1900

William Le Queux's *Of Royal Blood. A Story of the Secret Service* is published in London (Hutchinson and Co.).

E. Phillips Oppenheim's *A Millionaire of Yesterday* is published in London (Ward, Lock and Co.).

Barry Pain's *City Chronicles* appear in *Windsor Magazine* (December 1900-November 1901), and are published in volume form as *Deals* (1904).

Max Pemberton's *The Impregnable City* is published London, New York and Melbourne (Cassell and Co., Ltd.).

1901

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes returns to the Strand Magazine in the novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, serialized 1901-02, published in volume form (London: George Newnes) in 1902.

Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer's *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story* is published in London by Heinemann and in New York by McClure, Phillips and Co.

J.S. Fletcher's *The Three Days' Terror* is published in London (John Lang).

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is serialized in *McClure's Magazine* (from December 1900) and *Cassell's Magazine* (from January 1901). It is published in book form by Macmillan in October 1901.

Arthur R. and Mary E. Ropes's *On Peter's Island* is published in London (John Murray).

1902

The first series of Romney Pringle stories by 'Clifford Ashdown' (R. Austin Freeman and John James Pitcairn) appears in *Cassell's Magazine* (June-November 1902), collected in the same year as *The Adventures of Romney Pringle* (Ward, Lock).

H. Barton Baker's *Robert Miner, Anarchist* is published in London (Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd.).

Arnold Bennett's *The Grand Babylon Hotel* serialized in the *Daily Mail*. It is published in volume form in London (Chatto & Windus), New York (George H. Doran Co.) and Toronto (Bell and Cockburn).

Robert Cromie's *A New Messiah* is published by Digby, Long and Co.

William Le Queux's *The Under-Secretary* is published in London (Hutchinson and Co.).

Richard Marsh's short story 'La Haute Finance: A Tale of the Biggest Coup on Record' is published in *Windsor Magazine* (February).

Max Pemberton's *The Gold Wolf: The Story of a Man and His Money* is serialized in *Windsor Magazine*, June-November 1902. It is published in volume form by Ward, Lock & Co. in 1903.

1903

A second series of Clifford Ashdown's Romney Pringle stories is serialized as *Further Adventures of Romney Pringle* (June-November 1903) in *Cassell's Magazine*.

Guy Boothby's *The League of Twelve* is published in London (F.V. White and Co.).

Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* is published in London (Smith Elder and Co.).

A new series of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories is serialized in *Strand Magazine*. The stories are collected in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905).

A Fortune from the Sky by 'Skelton Kuppord' (John Adams) is published in London, Edinburgh, and New York (Thomas Nelson and Sons).

William Le Queux's *Secrets of the Foreign Office, describing the doings of Duckworth Drew, of the Secret Service* and *The Seven Secrets* are published in London (Hutchinson and Co.).

Isabel Meredith (Helen and Olivia Rossetti)'s *A Girl Among the Anarchists* is published in London (Duckworth and Co.).

1904

Robert Barr's Eugène Valmont stories appear in *Windsor* and *Pearson* magazines in 1904-05. They are published as *The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont* in 1906.

Hilaire Belloc's *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant, of Thames St., in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware: A Record of His Lineage, Speculations, Last Days and Death* is published in London (Methuen and Co., Ltd.).

William Le Queux's *The Man from Downing Street. A Mystery* is published in London (Hurst and Blackett).

B. Fletcher Robinson's *The Chronicles of Addington Peace*, comprising six stories, are serialized in *The Lady's Home Magazine* (August 1904-January 1905). They are published in book form as *The Chronicles of Addington Peace* by Harper and Brother, with two previously unpublished stories, one of which is 'The Story of Amaroff the Pole'.

1905

Harley Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* is first performed in London at the Royal Court Theatre. The play text is published in *Three Plays by Granville Barker* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1909).

Arnold Bennett's *The Loot of Cities* is serialized in *Windsor Magazine* and published in volume form as *The Loot of Cities: Being the Adventures of a Millionaire in Search of Joy. A Fantasia (*London: Alston Rivers, 1905).

(July) Conrad's 'Autocracy and War' appears in the *Fortnightly Review*.

William Le Queux's *The Czar's Spy. A Story of a Matter of Millions* is published in London (Hodder and Stoughton).

E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children* is serialized in Harmsworth's *London Magazine* (Jan. 1905-Jan. 1906). (Conrad's 'London's River' appears in the same magazine in July 1906.) Nesbit's novel is published in volume form by Wells Gardner in 1906.

Edgar Wallace publishes *The Four Just Men* in his own imprint of the Tallis Press, with the novella's conclusion withheld and a competition to guess the outcome in its place. Wallace brings out an extended version in 1906, with a new concluding chapter.

Wells's *Kipps: The Story of A Simple Soul* is published by Macmillan.

1906

Godfrey R. Benson's *Tracks in the Snow: Being the History of a Crime* is published in London (Longman & Co.).

(October-December) Conrad's *The Secret Agent* is serialized in the United States in *Ridgway's: A Militant Weekly for God and Country*. The serialized version is

substantially shorter (by about 30,000 words) than the book version, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, published the following year by Methuen.

Conrad's 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer' are published in the August and Christmas issues respectively of the American magazine *Harper's*, subsequently collected in *A Set of Six* (1908) with a subtitle of 'An Ironic Tale'.

John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* is published in London (William Heinemann).

Ford Madox Hueffer's *The Fifth Queen,* dedicated to Conrad, is published in London by Alston Rivers.

1907

A.C. Fox-Davies's *The Mauleverer Murders* is published in London (John Lane, The Bodley Head).

R. Austin Freeman's medical detective Dr John Thorndyke first appears in *The Red Thumb Mark* (1907). This is followed by approximately sixty novels and short stories over the next thirty years.

Jacques Futrelle's *The Thinking Machine* is published in London (Chapman & Hall).

The second volume of Hueffer's *Fifth Queen* trilogy, *Privy Seal*, is published by Alston Rivers.

1908

Belloc's *Mr. Clutterbuck's Election* is published in London (Eveleigh Nash).

Bennett's *Buried Alive* is published by Chapman & Hall.

Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* is published in London (J.R. Arrowsmith).

The first series of R. Austin Freeman's Dr Thorndyke short stories appear in *Pearson's Magazine*. They are collected in *John Thorndyke's Cases* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1909).

The third volume of Hueffer's Fifth Queen trilogy, *The Fifth Queen Crowned* is published by Eveleigh Nash.

Coulson Kernahan's *The Red Peril* is published in London (Hurst and Blackett, Ltd.).

E. Phillips Oppenheim's *The Secret* is published in London (Ward, Lock & Co.).

Max Pemberton's *Wheels of Anarchy* is published in London (Cassell and Company).

Wells's *The War in the Air* is serialized in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, and published in volume form by George Bell and Sons the same year.

1909

Wells's *Tono-Bungay* is serialized in the *English Review* (December 1908 to March 1909) with the subtitle *A Romance of Commerce*. It is published in volume form in 1909 by Macmillan.

1910

(December-October 1911) Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* is serialized in the *English Review*. It is published in volume form by Methuen (1911).

Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* is published by Cassell and Company, Ltd.

1911

The first of Chesterton's Father Brown stories are published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and collected as *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Cassell & Co.) the same year.

Mrs (Marie) Belloc Lowndes's *The Lodger* is serialized in *Cassell's Magazine* and published in volume form in 1913 (London: Methuen & Co.).

1912

(January-June) Conrad's *Chance* is serialized in the *New York Herald* and then in four other North American newspapers. It is published in volume form as *Chance: A Tale*

in Two Parts in New York (Doubleday) and London (Methuen and Co.). The first British edition is then cancelled and republished in 1914.

1916

John Buchan's *The Power-House* is published in Edinburgh and London (William Blackwood and Sons).

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